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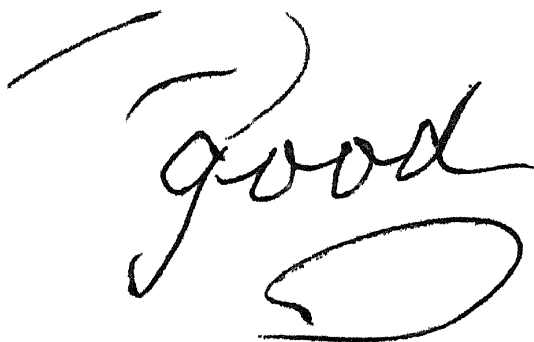
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PILEBUCK

PILEBUCK

by

JOHN AND WARD HAWKINS



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TO HELEN AND ADDIE AND LURTON

*who have been through
all of this before*

AND TO JACK

*one of the better pilebucks,
who told us how it was
with a full-rigged ship in the harbor
and no preparations made . . .*

This novel appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* under the title **THE SABOTEURS**.

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CHAPTER ONE

THERE was a girl at the cigar stand. Something small, blonde, and very nice. Sam Gallagher grinned at her as he passed on his way to the elevator, and got a look with ice on it.

The elevator boy said, "Floor, please?"

Sam Gallagher said, "Five, bud."

He was the only passenger. A mirror in the back of the old-fashioned cage gave him a glimpse of a stocky man in grey, badly made and badly in need of pressing. His shirt was frayed. The knot of his tie had worked loose, as it always did. He needed a shave. He looked, he decided, like something they swept out when the party was over. It was a holy wonder the blonde hadn't yelled for help.

The elevator boy said, "Here is five."

"And a smooth landing, bud."

He went along the hall to reach an unmarked door. This gave upon an office, high-ceilinged and huge, in the old manner, and sparsely furnished. Winter sunlight fell from tall windows to touch the small man at the desk. He looked at Gallagher gravely; he bent his head in greeting.

"Thane," said Gallagher, "I fixed it."

"Good," said James Thane.

"I met him when he came off shift. I hit him for a job. He didn't like it any better than I did, but he put me on the payroll. I go to work in the morning."

"In what capacity?"

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"Pileman."

"That's something rugged, I expect." James Thane's smile was faint, dry. "You'll probably get some exercise. You might even lose some of that stomach."

Gallagher said, "Laugh, you Judas."

"What else did you learn?"

"That's a big yard — so big it scares a man. They build ships faster than you could believe." He paused. "And the place is crawling with guards. There's a man to watch every square foot of it."

"Of course," said Thane.

"And Jeff hates my guts."

"You've mentioned that."

"Sure." Gallagher's eyes held concern. "And it's important. I'll have him riding me every damned minute of every day. I'll be out front. If anything slips, I get it in the neck. Or in the back."

"You take that chance," Thane admitted.

"Why me? Why do I get the tough ones?"

"Our problem," said Thane gently, "is to put men who won't be suspected on the job. One brother, however incompetent, may work for another unquestioned." Thane swiveled his chair. "Jeff is a shift boss out there. You were available."

"Two plus two," said Gallagher.

"Something like that."

"And it adds up to eightball."

"Ummm," said Thane. "Perhaps."

Gallagher lifted his head. "My insides are still bouncing from the last job," he said. "I'm only forty hours out of New York. I rate a day off. So how's to skip me, and use someone else in this spot?"

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"Time is our enemy."

Gallagher said, "That tripel!"

Thane was unperturbed. Gallagher met his level glance, thinking, He dreams those cracks up and then sits on them till they're needed! But that was wrong. Thane was small, trig, and he meant exactly what he said. He was black broadcloth, perfect linen, and a neat bowler hat. He had clean, fine hands. Tiny blue veins made a web over cheek-bones sharply defined. His hair was grey and lay smoothly against a narrow skull. The flesh of his face seemed almost transparent and was tightly drawn. His hawk profile might have been stamped upon a coin.

"You'll report by telephone," he said.

Gloomily, Gallagher said, "While I'm able."

"The rest has been arranged." Thane took a card from the desk drawer. "After you finish work tomorrow, you're to go to this address. We've done the best we could on short notice. You'll be expected."

"This is the part that gags me."

"You have my sympathy," said Thane.

"There must be some other angle."

"I'm afraid not." Somehow he made that final, without a change of expression. "And, Sam, this is not the time to quarrel with an order. Things are —"

"Save your breath," said Gallagher.

James Thane's head came up.

"I've heard that speech before; I've heard all your little speeches." Gallagher's crooked grin was faintly bitter. "Right now, I'm supposed to say, 'For the Fatherland!' and go do or die. Or both." He thrust his hands deep in his pockets. "Push me around, but spare the

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build-up. I'll take mine in cash; the glory you can keep."

"We understand each other, Sam."

"Yes," said Gallagher, "that we do."

He woke in darkness to the shrill crying of a bell. He found the 'phone on the night stand, and pulled it into bed with him. "Good morning, sir," a voice said. "It's three-thirty."

Sam Gallagher said, "Thanks."

He rubbed the sleep from his eyes and slid out of bed. The room was cold, damp. He closed the window and stood for a moment listening to the windy slash of rain against the glass. A car went by on the street below, and there was something lonely in the hurried sound of its passing.

He thought of Jeff. One of the good, solid guys. The old backbone-of-the-country type. He'd done pretty well for himself. He was up there, not far from the top of his particular pile. And he'd come through with money and a job, in spite of the way he felt. He'd thrown in a lecture about newspaper bums but that was to be expected. Jeff was as subtle as a kick in the teeth.

But he *had* come through. "A man's got to take care of his family," he'd said. "I'll start you on the lead-off. Report at four A.M. I'll stake you to boots, overalls, and a set of tools." It was funny. You went along, doing your job, and you forgot there were people in the world like Jeff. Simple, uncomplicated guys, who never looked sudden bitterness, who make it so damned easy for people like me. . . .

He took a shower but he did not shave. He put on a sweat-shirt, faded khaki trousers, and heavy work shoes.

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He was packing his single bag, taking a last look around, when someone knocked softly on the door.

Sam Gallagher stiffened at the unexpected sound. Then, unhurriedly, he bent over the open bag and pawed aside folded clothing to reach the flat automatic there. Straightening, he faced the door, a frown denting the flesh between his eyes, the gun held loosely at his side. He waited through perhaps ten seconds of utter silence. Then he went quietly around the end of the bed to the light switch. The click of it was startlingly loud. Sam Gallagher backed against the wall. And the knock came again. Sharp and insistent.

Across the street, a roof-top sign blinked on and off; the ruddy glare of it crimson on the rug, the walls. Rain thrummed on the windows. Sam Gallagher hunched his shoulders. There was no fire escape. No way through the bath to the room beyond. And whoever was in the hall had seen the filtering of light through the cracks around the door, had heard movement inside the room before knocking. So now— Gallagher's hands tightened. He looked down and then he grinned. The gun was a black shining in his right fist; in his left he clutched a can of tooth powder.

"Ummm," he said. "Nice, cool thinking."

The impatient knock sounded again.

Sam Gallagher said, "Coming, bud."

He pushed a chair close to the door; he thrust the gun down between the chair-arm and the seat cushion. Then he opened the door a bare three inches, holding his body against the wall to the right. He could see but little of the shadowed figure in the hall: a trim, belted raincoat, a white triangle of chin, and eyes that surveyed

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him frankly from beneath the brim of a brown and mannish felt.

"Well," said Sam, "hello, sis."

"You're Gallagher?" the girl said.

"Could be," said Sam. "And if I am?"

"Thane sent me."

"Thane?" said Sam. "Who's Thane?"

"Here." Her hand came out of her pocket holding an envelope. "Read this."

Sam Gallagher touched the light switch. He fished the single sheet of paper from the envelope and read the dozen words it bore. Then he crumpled the paper in his fist and moved backward to sit on the arm of the chair.

"Come in," he said.

The girl was smaller than she'd first seemed. Her hair was black, softly black, and she wore it combed back to a knot low on her neck. She was lovely and she was young. And she had poise, though she made no special point of it. Sam liked the shape of her eyes, the clean, high-breasted line of her, the laughter lurking in the corners of her mouth. Thane did well, Sam decided. Definitely she was one of the better jobs.

"There aren't many buses running at this time of night," she said. "Mr. Thane thought it would be best if I took you out to the yard in his car."

"Nice of the guy," said Sam.

He bent over the chair and slipped the gun from its place of concealment. He weighed it in his hand, watching her. She looked at it and then at him. She smiled.

"Do you play Indian, too?" she asked.

Sam said, "Only on Sunday."

"That's a good day for it," she said. "I've heard the

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guards out at the yard are a little tough with workmen who carry guns." She looked at his open bag. "I'll wait downstairs while you finish packing."

"I won't be long," Sam said.

The hotel was behind them, and the business district was behind them. The girl drove smoothly, holding Thane's big coupé to an easy thirty. Faint light from the dash touched her cheeks, her unsmiling mouth. Sam leaned forward to rub mist from the rain-streaked windshield.

"You haven't told me your name," he said.

"It's Jill. Jill McCann."

"God love us," he said. "She's Irish."

"With a dash of English, Swede, and Dutch. I think there was a German or two in the family, not so far back. They were farmers in Montana, as I remember, and pretty good ones too."

"Where'd you meet Thane?" he asked.

"In Paris."

"And now you're playing chauffeur?"

"Among other things," she said, and there was laughter in the words. "A man named McWhitty was supposed to take you out to the yard. He works there as a rigger."

"I know Mac," Sam said. "What happened?"

"He didn't like the idea. He said Thane was putting all his men in one basket. He was afraid someone would see you with him and start wondering how the two of you had met. Then they'd start asking questions. From there, the way Mr. McWhitty saw it, the two of you were tied together. If anything happened to one of you, the other —"

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"How many men work in the yard?" Sam asked.

"Between forty and fifty thousand."

"And perhaps a hundred of them know Mac." A smile touched Sam's mouth, an odd, tucked-in smile. "I think our friend McWhitty has a fine case of nerves."

"He's a good man," she said quietly.

"He must be." Sam's voice turned rough. "He got out of taking me to the yard, after Thane had him picked for the job. Knowing Thane, that's really something."

She said, "We're almost there."

He could see the lights of the shipyard now. The night was ablaze with them. It was as if they had come over the hill to find a whole city spread out below them, along the bank of the river. Here were buildings of tremendous size — bigger, Sam thought, than the Lakehurst dirigible hangars — but so widely spaced their hugeness was lost in the total pattern. He had a brief glimpse of railroad spurs, branching like the fingers of a spread hand, of locomotives panting behind white headlights. There were office buildings, warehouses, and other structures whose function Sam could not guess.

"Lord!" he whispered.

"Surprised?" she asked.

"It's big," he said. "Man, how big!"

"It has to be." Her voice was matter-of-fact. "They're building two aircraft carriers here. They have two more — conversion jobs — at the outfitting dock. There are two cruisers about done. And two big mine-layers."

"Any other little knick-knacks?"

She nodded. "Yes. They're building merchant hulls here, too. Tankers and freighters. The Liberty ships."

"Sounds good," he said.

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"And important."

"Let's skip that and get to the point," he said. "Let's talk about you. Will you split a dinner with me some night soon?"

"May I bring the children?" she asked.

"Child —" Sam Gallagher swallowed. "Sure," he said sourly. "Bring the kids. Bring your husband too!"

She laughed softly. "It's an idea."

"Lady," he said, "this's where I get off!"

He crossed the street, bending his head against the rough pawing of the wind. The rain had a cold sting and a bite. Up ahead, hundreds of men bunched in the glare of floodlights, filing through narrow aisles fenced in steel mesh. Sam Gallagher joined one of the lines. He got to the gate, and there a slickered cop blocked his way.

"Where're you goin'?" he said.

"Inside," said Sam. "I work here."

"Maybe. But you don't get in without a badge."

Sam Gallagher tipped his head; his hat brim spilled rain water across his face. The corners of his mouth pulled inward in a grin. "Okay," he said. "I'm new and I'm dumb. What's this badge? Where do I get one?"

"At the gate office. Over there."

This was a building close-by. The door was open. Sam Gallagher went in to stand with a dozen others at a counter. A shirt-sleeved clerk questioned him briefly, then said, "I'll call Jeff Gallagher. He'll have to come over and take you through the gate. He's clear at the end of the yard, so it'll be a while."

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Sam said, "Thanks, bud."

He turned to the rain-streaked windows. Outside, the yard was ablaze with light. A locomotive chuffed by, dragging a string of flat cars laden with sheet steel. Beyond, as far as he could see, there was the elaborate and intricate scaffolding of the ways, topped by the dim shapes of giant cranes. Everywhere there were patches of blue-white glare; intense and hurting to the eye. Sam pivoted slowly. The clerk was watching him.

"Big place," said Sam.

"One of the biggest."

"How many shipways have you here?"

"Twenty-five, and more building."

"A man could lose himself out there."

"Men have," the clerk said dryly. "But not for long. The guards find them."

Sam propped his elbows on the counter and waited. Nearly a half hour had passed before an inner door opened, one which gave upon the yard, and Jeff Gallagher came out of the night. He wore a jacket, a hip-length slicker; his shirt was open at the throat. His face was saddle-brown; his mouth straight-cut. There was a good leanness about the man, a nice spread of shoulder. His hands were hard, competent. But it was the way he moved that got to Sam. Jeff had sureness and ease. He belongs here, Sam thought. This's his kitchen, and I'm moving in. If anything slips, he's the guy I'll have to face. And God help me then!

"Here's your badge," said Jeff. "Come on."

Sam Gallagher pinned the numbered disc to his hat band, and they went out into the yard together. The rain

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seemed colder now; the night was alive with a machine-gun roaring. "Chipping hammers," Jeff shouted, and struck off to the south, past the towering scaffolds of the ways. "Watch your step."

"Don't think I won't," said Sam.

A railroad crane went by, a huge box of some kind swinging from its hook. Farther along, they waited while carriers passed — long-legged water bugs of machines, with stacks of lumber tucked up under their bellies. New sound swelled up around them: the bellow of heavy engines, a slow-paced thump and crash, and a sharp whining that was an endless cry.

And still they walked, heading south. Finally, the buildings and the shipways were behind them. Here the land was stripped and barren — empty save for huge lumber piles and a cluster of small shacks.

"Here's the tool shed," said Jeff.

He pushed open a door bearing a sign which read: "Seaboard Construction." They went into a room empty of men and crowded with gear. Tool boxes stood in rows; coils of rope, cable, and wire were heaped in the corners. Overalls hung from the four walls. Boots, caulked boots, were scattered across the floor.

Sam said, "Lonely around here."

"The shift's working." Jeff knelt beside a tool box. "I'm lending you these tools. Take care of them."

"What do I do out there?"

"You're a pilebuck," said Jeff.

"Pilebuck? What's that?"

"We build the yards, Sam. We move in where there is nothing but a stretch of shore and some timber. We build the shipways, the outfitting docks, the drydocks,

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the Whirley trestles. The boys who build the ships follow us. Most of the time they're stepping on our heels. They are laying keel before we finish a shipway."

"As fast as that?"

"They've streamlined ship building. They build whole sections — the bow, the deck house — and lift them in place with the Whirleys. The old Hog Island yard wouldn't be a patch on the seat of the pants of this one." Jeff frowned. "But they can't put 'em together till we give them a place to work. That's our job. How it's done is something you'll have to learn. A good pilebuck is part carpenter, part steel-man, part rigger, part mill-wright, with a liberal shot of plain mule."

"What'll I need out there?"

"A hammer, tape, a top-maul."

"Whatever that is," said Sam.

Jeff looked up, eyes thoughtful. "It's a sort of sledge," he said. "The good ones weigh six or seven pounds." He got to his feet. "And so you'll know, those gadgets in the corners are peevees. That thing alongside your feet is a snatch-block. There's a three-two. Those long saws are cross-cuts." He smiled faintly. "You'll find out about those."

Sam said, "Thanks, teacher."

He saw Jeff flinch; saw his mouth whiten and his hands clench. "You —" said Jeff, and let the rest go with his escaping breath. Then, tightly, he said, "You haven't changed much. You always were noisy. You know all the answers — or thought you did."

"It was a lousy crack. You can skip —"

Curtly, Jeff said, "We'll take care of it now!"

Sam's eyes came up; his head did not. His face was

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bare of expression. He waited, shoulders hunched, hands loose at his sides.

"I'm boss here," said Jeff.

Sam said, "You are."

"You rate just what the others rate. Or less, because you're a green hand. Get out of line, and I'll fire you as fast as I'd fire one of them."

"Yes."

"And no cracks. Understand?"

"Yes."

"We're brothers, but we're not working at it." Jeff's mouth dragged down at the corners. "All I want from you is a day's work for a day's pay."

"That's a deal," said Sam.

There was silence — silence save for the cry of the wind in the eaves, the booming voice of the job. Sam did not move; his face held its wooden, stubborn look. He met Jeff's eyes steadily. High color burned in Jeff's cheeks. He lifted his hands.

"You could've written."

"Could I?" said Sam.

"I sent two air-mail letters. I cabled." Jeff said that carefully, but he couldn't hide his disgust. He hated this, Sam knew. But he'd go on, for it was in the man to bull his way through to the end of any dirty, unpleasant job. "She knew she was dying; she made the doctors tell her that. But she hung on for weeks, waiting for word from you."

"And it didn't come."

"You were her favorite, God knows why. She knew you were no damn' good. She got you out of jams; she fed you between jobs. If anyone had a bad

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word for you, she came down on them with both feet."

"Go on. Get it over. We made a deal. Remember?" Sam's voice was wickedly soft. "All you want from me is a day's work for a day's pay. That's all you're going to get!"

He saw a vein swell and throb in Jeff's temple; saw the slow closing of his hands. "She was your only friend and you let her down," Jeff said, voice hoarse with anger held in rigid check. "You've got louse blood! Anyone who depends on you gets a kick in the teeth for their trouble. So I'm warning you; I'll say it only once. Don't try anything here!"

"Afraid I'll wreck your playhouse?"

"No, I'm not afraid." Jeff rubbed a fist against an open palm. "You ran for home when things got tough. You put the bite on me for money and a job. Once I thought you were a pretty big guy, Sam. Now I've got you pegged." He went past Sam to the door. He turned there and looked at Sam, impersonally, as he would have looked at a stranger. "Get into your overalls," he said. "You're overdue on the job."

"Be right with you," said Sam.

But after Jeff had gone, he stood listening, face turned to the light. He let his breath go; he pressed his hands hard against his thighs to still their trembling. That had been close. Too close! He'd ached to feel the bone of Jeff's face under his fists. He was sick with that want, weak with it. Sure, he told himself. One punch would've fixed things right! The image of Thane rose in his mind then, cool, small, and utterly competent. That Iceberg, Sam thought, and a bitter grin touched his mouth. He'd've had my hide for a rug.

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Sam Gallagher bent over the tool-box.

Behind him, the door slapped open and for a moment Sam wondered if Jeff had returned. Still crouching, Sam turned to face the door and found a short man standing there. The newcomer was dark; he wore carpenter's overalls, a knee-length slicker, and a battered rain hat. He scowled at Sam.

Pleasantly, Sam said, "Hi, Fella."

"You're new," the short man said.

"This's my first shift," Sam admitted.

"I'm Jack Russ. I'm Steward here."

"So," said Sam, and waited.

The short man came toward Sam, limping heavily. "So I want a look at your permit. Where is it?"

"They gave me a badge at the gate," Sam said. "The Guard wouldn't let me in until Jeff came out and —"

"Badge!" There was disgust in Russ' voice. "T'hell with that badge stuff. What I want's your work permit. From the Union — the Local."

Sam Gallagher bent his head, smiling a little. "You had me confused," he said, and got his wallet from his hip pocket. "I haven't got a work permit, but I've a card from the Union. Will that do?"

"You're a member?" Russ said.

"A brother," said Sam, still smiling. "I joined today."

The short man took the card from Sam. He examined it carefully, turning it in his blunt fingers. Then he stepped back and looked at Sam, his head tipped, his eyes narrow and somehow bitter.

"Anything the matter?" Sam asked.

"The card's okay, if that's what you mean. You're a

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member in good standin', with your dues paid for three months." Russ gave the card back to Sam. "I was just rememberin' how it was six months or a year ago." He laughed shortly. "An' I was thinkin' it's a fine grade of Sunday pilebucks we get nowadays."

Sam said, "I guess you're right."

Jack Russ took a couple of peevees from the stack in the corner. Shouldering them, he limped to the door. There he said, "You better get the lead out, guy. You ain't gettin' paid for hidin' out."

"I'll be right with you," Sam said.

The deck ended abruptly. Beyond lay the timber bones of the uncompleted shipway, the lights, the fire, and the black water. Rows of piling jutted above the harbor's surface; log rafts swam there. And while Sam watched, the group around the fire left it to splash out, thigh deep, into the water.

Sam said, "Now why —"

A harsh voice cut across his thought. "It took you long enough." Jeff was there. He'd come out of the dark to Sam's side. His eyes held the red reflection of the fire; his face was wooden still.

"I got lost," said Sam.

Jeff nodded. "You would."

"Those guys in the water? What —"

"Cut-off," said Jeff. "Come on."

"Me? I've got to go out there?"

Quietly, Jeff said, "That's where the work is."

He led the way across the web of timber to the fire. Gingerly, Sam followed, acutely conscious of the gaps that yawned on either side. Jeff was waiting when he clambered down. Beside Jeff, was a stocky man, heavy

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shouldered and solid, who raked Sam with a coldly green, appraising stare.

"Here's your pardner," said Jeff.

"And a McGee, if ever I saw one!"

Disgust rode the words. It was in the flat, to-hell-with-you way the stocky man spoke, in the way he held himself on wide-planted feet. He wore no slicker; his shirt was open to the waist. There was red hair on his forearms, chest, and a slab of it lay under his pushed-back hat. Tough, Sam thought. A good man to have on my side.

He said, "Hi, Red."

"The name's Kelly."

"Okay. Kelly it is."

"We got work to do," Kelly growled.

He swung on his heel and went to the water's edge. He picked up a saw there — five feet of shining steel — and then strode on, out into the water, without a backward look.

Jeff said, "What're you waitin' for?"

"The pulmotor squad," said Sam.

The water was cold — so cold the first icy shock of it burned. Sam Gallagher swore, and then clamped his jaws so his teeth wouldn't chatter. Numbness got into his legs, his thighs. The water was at his waist. Kelly was still ahead of him, going out deeper.

"Where's the diving helmets?" Sam called.

Kelly didn't answer that. He was standing beside a row of piling, waiting. "These are our babies," he said. "Let's get started." Sam nodded and edged around the man to pass between two of the piling. Something caught him wickedly, just above the knees. He floundered and went down. An iron hand grasped his shoul-

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der; he was yanked erect to hear Kelly's flaming curse.

"Watch them straight-edges!"

"It was just a board," said Sam. "I fell —"

Laughter came from the men nearby. Blood darkened Kelly's face. "Get on the other end of the saw," he said hoarsely. "An' this time go 'round!"

He carefully circled the end of the row and came back opposite the scowling Kelly. From here out, he told himself, it'll be different. Nothing complicated about a saw. You pull, then the other guy pulls. Easy enough. Sam grinned through lips stiff with cold.

"Let's whack her off," he said.

And Kelly said, "Grab on!"

Sam learned what a straight-edge was then. The board he'd fallen over had been nailed to the piling, a foot or so beneath the surface of the water, as a guide for the saw. There was one on each side of the row. The blade of the saw was held flat against these; the saw was pulled gently back and forth to start the cut.

"How are yuh?" Kelly asked.

"Colder than a witch's —"

"The saw! How's the saw?"

"Just fine," said Sam. "Nice of you to ask."

Afterward, he knew that had been a mistake. Kelly had asked if the saw-cut had been started at the proper level on Sam's side of the piling. He moved in to satisfy himself of that. He lifted a scowling face.

"You're high," he said. "Watch it."

"I'd have to have gills —" Sam began.

And the saw handle tried to tear itself from his grasp. Sam bent far over, setting his strength to match Kelly's driving stroke. The saw jammed now and then; the

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thrust of Sam's arms threw water into his face, his eyes. But it wasn't so bad. He could forget the bitter cold of the water. He even found a kind of savage pleasure in holding the furious pace.

After a time, the first piling swayed. Kelly pulled the saw free. He said, "Watch her!" and shoved the ten-foot pile-butt over. Sam Gallagher ducked away from the splash and then looked up to find Kelly in position for the next cut. Waiting. Sam moved that way, fumbling deep in the water for the saw. And Kelly swore at him.

"Want to lose a hand?" he asked.

"Not if I can help it."

"This thing's got teeth." Kelly lifted the saw out of the water; light splintered across the jagged edge of it. "Rake your hand across 'em and you'll lay it open like you hit it with an ax. Only worse. Saws leave a ragged gash. They don't heal so good."

"I'll remember that," said Sam.

"You better," said Kelly. "Let's go."

Again he bent to the work. And again there was the gentle run of the saw until the cut was well begun. Then the pace lifted. Sam's thoughts turned to the fire, to the fierce heat there. He wondered if he'd ever been really warm. The cold had got through to the bone of him now; there was a bright, sharp ache at the base of his neck; his arms were heavy.

He tried counting the saw strokes and that didn't help. He twisted his head to watch the others working close-by. There were six of them, three teams. One team finished a cut and came splashing past Sam on the way ashore. A little man, wiry and dark, threw him a tortured grin.

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"A bitch!" he said. "A tough show."

"She's that," Sam agreed.

And Kelly growled, "Pull the saw, McGee!"

Sam thought of an answer for that, pointed and profane, but he kept it to himself. Breath was far too precious to waste in talk. The sharp ache had spread across his shoulders; his arms and his hands were numb. He guessed at the progress of the saw, measuring it against his remaining strength. He knew Kelly would not stop until the cut was finished. He hated the man for that until he thought of him as a machine — a kind of Rube Goldberg gadget, complete with self-starter and paddle-wheel. He giggled as a crazy thought flicked through his mind: He'll need an oil change after working out here. He really will!

"That's it," Kelly said. "Run for the fire."

And Gallagher said, "I love you, my friend."

The others made room. Sam spread his stiffened hands to the flames, soaking up the heat. He got a grin from the wiry, little man. Another, a slender chap, tall and thin, said, "You picked a fine time to hit this job," through lips blue with cold.

Sam shivered. "Looks that way."

He fumbled for a cigarette and found the package soaked, ruined. He tossed it in the fire and looked up to find Kelly laughing at him. The wiry man offered a dry package, saying, "Don't look so sad, guy. The same thing's happened to all of us."

"Once," said Kelly. "But only once."

"This water work's new to me," said Sam.

"That ain't all that's new to you."

There was a blunt harshness in Kelly's voice, in the

direct thrust of his eyes. The other talk ran off to silence, leaving only the querulous splutter of the fire, the pelting hiss of the rain. Gunning for me, was Sam's quick, astonished thought. And he wondered just what lay behind Kelly's driving anger.

Quietly, he said, "You could be right."

He turned his back to the fire, trying to warm the pain in his shoulders. He listened as the talk began again. The wiry man was Ikey, and somehow that name fit. Clyde was the tall, slender chap; another, square-cut and dark, was Calaban.

"Whiskey," said Ikey. "That's for me."

He dug under a pile of oil-skins and came up with a square flask. Lifting it to the light, he wobbled his hand and grinned. "Anti-freeze for my radiator," he said. "This's the stuff to keep the cold out."

"You've had enough," said Kelly.

"There's no such thing as enough."

"For you, there is."

It was Jeff Gallagher's voice. He came down the slanting web of timber to the fire. "Put it away," he said. "I don't yell about a drink or two when you're working tides, but you've had plenty for one night."

"One more, an' I'll bite them piling off."

Jeff said, "We like to have you use a saw."

He was pleasant about it, but definite too. Ikey made a sound of deep regret; the other laughed. Then, in the same mild tone, Jeff said, "It's a shame I can't drag the work up here. Then you guys wouldn't have to get away from the fire."

"We're a-comin'," said Ikey.

The men left the fire in a group. They were knee-deep

in the water when Ikey came plowing out with an Indian yell. He stumbled and caught at Kelly's shoulder. For a moment it looked as if both men would go down. Then the stocky Kelly was propping Ikey back on his feet, snarling at him. Sam Gallagher chuckled.

Kelly whirled. "What's so funny?"

"Ikey. He's really got a cargo aboard."

"So he has. So what?" Kelly hitched at his pants, mouth twisted. "Drunk or sober, Ikey's a good man on a saw. Damn' good. There ain't enough like him around."

"I see what you mean," said Sam.

Almost at once he was cold again, chilled through. The dull ache was in his back, his arms. His legs were solid ice. The saw jammed more often, and Sam began to dread the savage pull it cost to yank it free. Time, now, was not measured by minutes and hours, but by the pendulum swing of the saw, the infrequent rests at the fire.

His hands were puffed and blistered before they stopped for lunch. Afterward, the blisters broke and the pull of the saw handle against the raw flesh burned like naked flame. Twice, in as many moments, Sam let the saw handle slip away from him. And Kelly swore.

"I've had all I'll take!" he snapped.

He stalked shoreward, rage in the stiff set of his back. Jeff Gallagher met him at the water's edge. Sam leaned against a piling, watching the two. He straightened his cramped hands, trying to ease the pain in them. He was not surprised when Kelly climbed the bank to the fire, and Jeff came wading out.

"Kelly says you're having trouble, Sam."

"Ah," said Sam. "The tattle-tale."

"You're not funny." Jeff stood waist-deep. There was

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nothing in his face to show he felt the shocking bite of the water. Sam hated him for that. "Kelly's a good man on cut-off, Sam. He says you're riding the saw."

"Don't get technical," said Sam wearily. "Kelly pulls, then I pull. What more do you want?"

Jeff said, "Quite a lot."

He went past Sam and, carefully, he took the saw from the half-completed cut. He held it above the water. "The blade's curved," he said. "It's wide in the center, narrow at both ends. There's a reason."

"What's this riding I do?"

"You don't rock the saw."

"Go on," said Sam. "Make sense."

"After you've made your pull you're supposed to rock the saw — push it outward a little. That lets the raker teeth clean the sawdust from the cut. You haven't been doing that. So the saw runs hard. It binds."

"And Kelly has to work," said Sam.

"You've been on the easy end. You don't know —" Jeff's grin was a shadow, haunting his mouth. "Let's finish this cut."

"I get it. You're going to ride."

"You've asked for it," said Jeff.

For perhaps a moment the saw ran easily, smoothly. "That's the way it should be done," said Jeff. "Here's the way you do it —" And, instantly, the saw jammed. It took all Sam's strength to pull it free. He fought it through that stroke, the next. And he stopped then, panting for breath. Heavily, he said, "Am I that bad?"

"Almost," said Jeff.

"How do I fix it?"

"Remember to rock the saw and you —" Jeff broke

off there. He leaned forward to catch Sam's hand and turn the palm to the light. He whistled. "No more cut-off for you today," he said. "I'll find you another job."

"No," Sam protested. "I'm doing fine. I —"

"Go up to the fire, Sam. That's an order."

A slow rage woke in Sam. He squeezed his swollen hands into fists. "T'hell with that," he said hoarsely. "I'm not asking for special treatment. I don't want it!"

"I'm boss here."

"And I'm paid to work. I want to work."

Jeff looked at him, face tight, unyielding. His eyes shiny with thought. "You've got a point there," he said at last. "But you're letting your crazy pride make a complete damn' fool of you." He nodded at the shore. "Red Shaw's using the spiking gun on deck plank. Take over his job. Tell Red I want him down here."

Roughly, Sam said, "Yes, sir."

"You're still a fool," said Jeff.

Sam Gallagher turned his back on Jeff. He plowed angrily ashore; he tried to take the bank at a run. But cold and exhaustion had him now. The muscles of his legs, his thighs, were flaccid and trembling. He stumbled and almost fell.

Calaban and Ikey were standing with Kelly at the fire. Steam rose from their drying clothes. Sam felt the heat of the flames; saw the white, questioning turn of their faces as he passed. And he wanted desperately to stop. Wanted rest, warmth, and a dry cigarette. But he went on, jaws so tightly set they ached. He knew Jeff was watching him. And he knew, now, how utterly right Jeff had been.

He went upward across the slanting web of timber

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to the place where the deck was going in — wooden flesh to cover the wooden bones of the shipway. Wan daylight had come to turn the floodlights pale. The shipway to the north was plainly visible — the towering scaffolding which climbed the flanks of the nearly completed aircraft carrier, the hundreds of tin-hatted workmen who swarmed there. Sam Gallagher tipped his head back to look up, far up, to the deck of the carrier.

“What do you think of her?”

The speaker was a workman who knelt close-by, a big man whose rain-wet face held a friendly smile. He nodded at the aircraft carrier. “A beauty, isn’t she?”

“And big,” said Sam. “Plenty big.”

“You should take a walk down the line and look at the others. Some of ’em make that carrier look like a rowboat.”

“A man wonders how they’ll ever get them in the water.” Sam rubbed his mouth with the back of one hand. “Jeff sent me to find a guy named Shaw. Is he around?”

“Over there.”

Nearby there were rows of spikes barely started in the plank. A lanky man moved along these rows with a contrivance which looked and sounded like a rivet-gun. He fitted the tip of this to the head of a spike. The thing thundered briefly in his hands; the spike sank home.

“Red Shaw?” Sam asked.

The man nodded. “That’s me.”

“Jeff wants you on cut-off.”

“So I get my tail wet, huh?”

“Maybe,” said Sam. “I take over here.”

Shaw grinned. “Okay by me,” he said. “But watch the gun. The thing’s a McGee. It’s got no spring.”

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II

"I'll make out," Sam told him.

Red Shaw moved away. There were others near at hand — the big man who knelt on the deck, a crew of three piling plank on a truck. Sam felt them watching as he bent over. The gun was heavier than he'd expected, solid with compact weight. A black air-hose fed into the handle; a curving trigger jutted from the metal there.

"Hey!" someone yelled. "Watch —"

There was a sharp and vicious whip-crack of sound; the gun leaped in Sam's hands. Something — the metal guts of it — lashed out from the snout. And for a brittle second the whole scene was frozen in Sam's mind: the sweep of deck, the man who knelt in the bullet path of the metal, his upturned face, distorted mouth. The warning cry still rang in Sam's ears when he saw the man's hat-brim jerk as the hurtling object passed, heard the solid smash of it against the lumber pile beyond. Sam's knees let go then. He found himself sitting on doubled legs. He still held the gun across his thighs, trigger pressed full down. But the thunder of it was gone. It was dead save for the noisy hiss of escaping air.

Quick voices broke across the quiet. Red Shaw came running back, slicker crackling around his legs. "I told you!" he panted, and there was pallor beneath his tan. "Man, I told you to watch that gun! I thought —"

"Yes," said Sam Gallagher, "you told me."

He got to his feet then. He went past Shaw and the others. The big man had not moved. A hammer lay where it had fallen from his hand; deck spikes were scattered around his knees. He looked up at Sam, lifting a hand to touch the red welt at his temple.

"That was close," he said.

"I'm sorry," said Sam. "I didn't know —"

Shaw swore thickly. He said, "I told you the gun didn't have no spring. Brownie, you heard me. You —"

"We all heard you," the big man said.

"What's wrong?" a voice demanded.

There was authority in the harsh question. Sam Gallagher wheeled and found a tall man looking down at him. This man wore a grey business suit, beautifully tailored, expensive. His eyes were blue; his hat was pushed back on sandy hair. He was smiling.

"This gun —" Sam began.

And Brownie cut in to say, "He hit the trigger by mistake. The works came out of the gun. No harm done."

"I suppose you lost the snap?"

"No," said Brownie. "We'll find it."

The tall man bent his head. His white smile was not a smile at all, Sam saw, but the empty shape of one. The movement of lips held away from strong, white teeth.

"Then get at it," the tall man said. "Don't stand here and talk. Get back to work."

"Right away," Brownie said.

The others — Red Shaw and the lumber crew — were already scattering. Sam Gallagher started back toward the gun, and the tall man said, "You've got spikes all over the deck. I want them picked up and used. They cost money."

Brownie said, "Yes, Mr. Lessing."

The tall man strode off. Brownie found the missing parts of the gun. "The snap and plunger are loose inside the barrel," he said. "You hit the trigger and the works came out like a shot from a rifle. But hold it so. Fit it

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on a spike. Then —" The gun yammered briefly; the spike went down. "Like that. Don't touch the trigger unless the gun's on a spike."

"I'll remember," said Sam.

"Sure. You'll be okay now."

"You can bet I'll be careful. I came within an inch of killing you."

Brownie chuckled. "But you didn't. You'll have to do better than that to get me."

"Who's the lad with the teeth?"

"Lessing. He's the General Manager."

"Some grin he's got." Sam Gallagher curled his lips in imitation of the tall man's smile. "He could give a bobcat the first bite and still do well. Red Riding Hood wouldn't have a chance with him around."

"He draws plenty of water," Brownie said.

"And he was yelling about a few spikes?"

"Yes," said Brownie. "He's fussy that way."

Sam said, "Then we better get to work."

The job was not as simple as it had looked. The gun bucked and tore at Sam's hands; the jarring pound of it got into his shoulders, his back. And he was haunted by the memory of that warning cry, the hurtling flash of metal, the deep, ragged wound in the lumber pile. Red Shaw *had* tried to tell him about the gun, but Sam, in the grip of the rage that had driven him past the fire, had not listened. He had almost killed a man.

He was careful now. He did not know when the rain ceased to fall, or when the little groups of men appeared to bunch up along the deck. He thought only of the gun, the endless rows of spikes. He was moving forward, yanking at the air-hose, when a swart, laughing man

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stepped up to touch his arm, to say, "Hell, guy, the whistle blew. You ain't tryin' to work two shifts, are yuh?"

And Sam said, "God forbid!"

The bus was heavily crowded. Sam clung to a strap, jostled by tin-hatted workmen from the yard. He could still feel the slamming jar of the spiking gun in his flesh. He was bruised and sore. But he managed an inward grin, thinking, "I'd like to get Thane down there. I'd lose him, and he'd starve before he found his way out."

He remembered the card Thane had given him then. He fished it from his pocket and edged forward to stand behind the driver.

"How do I find 420 West Cherry?" he asked.

"Get off on Twenty-fourth. Take an 'A' bus."

It was something less than a half hour's ride. The "A" bus ground away up the hill and Sam Gallagher walked slowly into West Cherry Drive. This was a quiet street, curving down under trees full-bodied and old. The houses were small; the lawns well-kept. A tricycle lay where some youngster had forgotten it on the walk; there was a child's red play-pen on the porch across the way.

He paused, struck by something about this place — an air of friendliness, easy and casual. It made him remember another street, the smell of grass and rain, and leaf-shadow dappling the walks. Dusty summer evenings. Games you played on the corner, belting hell-for-leather out of the dark at the cry of "Run-Sheep-Run!" And a girl, a leggy kid in braids, who could cover short-stop as well as any boy— Bitterness came to Sam Gallagher's

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eyes. His mouth had a wry twist now. He found no pleasure in remembering. It made him feel old, tired. As rootless as a tumbleweed.

He walked up the street. The number he sought was in the middle of the block. The house was white, vaguely Cape Cod, and it bore the scars of living, or children in that rough age between eight and twelve. The porch was small, shadowed. Sam rang. He saw his face mirrored in the dusty panes of the door window — a tough face, dark with a stubble of red beard, mud-splashed and dirty. And then the door swung wide.

“Hello, Mr. Gallagher.”

The speaker was a girl — a woman. She wore tailored slacks and a pert little apron, and somehow the combination did not seem absurd.

“You?” said Sam. “You’re here?”

Jill McCann smiled. “Obviously.”

“A fine sense of humor you’ve —”

Sam Gallagher stopped there. Jill McCann’s glance was level, cool and appraising. Sam felt himself redden under it. He was conscious of his clothes, smeared with grease and dirt, of his muddy boots.

“I came straight from work,” he said.

She nodded. “So I see.”

She moved aside then and he went past her. A short entrance hall gave upon the living room. This was a friendly place, simply furnished, made cheerful by slip-covers warm with color. The chairs looked soft and deep. A bowl of yellow flowers stood on a low table. A fire burned in the fireplace. Sam Gallagher stopped in the archway. He scowled and shook his head.

“Where’s the kitchen?” he said.

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II

"To your left," she replied quietly.

He pushed through a swinging door. The kitchen was large and modern. An alcove held a breakfast table, chairs of steel and wood. Sam Gallagher sat down carefully. "This's for me," he said. "The place where we fry the eggs." He looked at Jill.

"Sit down," he said. "Join the party."

Gravely, she shook her head. "No thanks."

"I don't bite people. I'm house-broken."

"Umm," she said. "You're polite, too."

His blackened hands lay across his thighs. He looked at them. Fatigue was upon him like a numbing weight. "I'm tired," he said. "I'm muddy and greasy. I came out here because I didn't want to ruin one of those chairs in the other room. I should —"

"You don't have to explain," she said.

He lifted his head. "Black hair and grey eyes. And temper. I knew a woman who had black hair and grey eyes. She found her fiancé kissing a blonde waitress; she kicked all the windows out of a mountain lodge. But she was efficient about it. She put on ski boots first."

"I have no ski boots," she said.

He grinned at her. "If the way you say that means anything, Gallagher's off to a bad start again." He hunted for a cigarette. Finding none, he put his hand palm-down on the table. "Why didn't you tell me you'd be here?"

"Because you didn't ask." She got cigarettes and matches from a drawer and brought them to the table. "We have some bourbon. Would you like me to make you a drink?"

"Yes," he said. "A big one, McCann."

He watched her take ice from the refrigerator, bourbon from the cupboard. He liked the way she moved, liked the clean, high-breasted line of her. Cool, he decided, was the word for Jill McCann.

She put the drink in front of him and then sat down in the chair directly opposite.

"Not a nice job he handed you."

"No," she said, "but someone had to do it."

"Thane knows the answers," Sam said thoughtfully. "And he can improvise. The problem here was to get me into the shipyard, to keep me there. The draft board puts the finger on any single man. He gets measured for a rifle. I had to be in Class 3A. I needed a wife and dependents."

"Enter McCann," she said.

"How'd you bump into Thane?"

"He needed someone who could draw."

"And you're an artist," Sam said.

"Of a sort. I covered fashions."

He became interested in his drink and she bent her head, remembering a town set deep in a bowl of hills, a dusty railroad platform, and heat that struck at you like a club. The way her suitcase had bumped her legs, the ticket which read: Missoula, Mont., to Paris, France, and return — Funny, the odd little things that come back to you: a porter's shining face, the slash of a quartering sea beneath grey fog, the mournful howling of a liner's whistle, the neat signs which said: Tourist Class Passengers Not Permitted On Promenade Deck —

Tag ends of memory, the residue of years. And the big things, the important things, had been dimmed by time. Perhaps because they had hurt. A career, or the dream

of one, dumped in an ash can, along with a hundred sketches torn in neat quarters, and canvases that had been cut to bits. M. Corré, whose face she could not recall, saying, "Talent you do not have, my dear. I suggest you go back to this Montana of yours."

Sam Gallagher said, "A fashion artist, eh?"

"Yes," she said, smiling faintly. "I fell into the job. And it was fun — until things came unstuck."

"You worked for Thane in Paris?"

"And in Rotterdam. In Lisbon."

Sam Gallagher said, "So did I."

"I know," she replied quietly.

And she did. They had almost met in Lisbon, and again in London. James Thane had talked of Gallagher. "Red hair and a nose that bends off toward Maggie's. He speaks three languages well and can swear in a dozen others. A good man, Jill, and one you ought to know." Out of that she'd made a picture in her mind. Now, only his eyes were as she'd known they'd be, wise and kind and shot through with a reckless light. For the rest — there was something — a cold and measured toughness in the man, in the set of his mouth, in the blunt planes of his dirty, bearded face. "Of course," she told herself with faint regret, "he has to be that way. It's his job." And then she found herself wishing she'd known Sam Gallagher before Prague, before any of the hell had been unleashed upon the world.

He stretched his legs, smiling at her above the rim of the glass. "You're a handsome wench," he said. "Well put together."

"That's the wolf in you speaking."

"Or the bourbon," he said. "But as an old Southern

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gentleman, I resent that, ma'am. I resent it deeply."

She looked at him, color burning in her cheeks. "There are a few things you should know about me," she said. "Then we'll drop the subject. For good. I look like the devil in the morning. I have a shrew's tongue, and I can hit well with either hand." Her frosty eyes held his. "Is that clear, Mr. Gallagher?"

"Very," he said. "I'm told off, McCann."

"Good. Will you meet the children now?"

He whistled. "There's more than one — ?"

"There are two. Paul and Gretchen."

He rolled the glass between his palms. "Thane really did a job on me," he said wryly. "First he throws me to Jeff to be used for a football. Then he gives me a wife and two kids for stage dressing and background." He let his breath go, disgust in the rough planes of his face. "We may as well have it over," he said. "Wheel 'em in, McCann."

"You are so sorry for you," she said acidly.

She left him then. He smiled dimly, straightening against the pull of stiffening muscles. He rubbed his knuckles into eyes sooty with exhaustion. He had time to finish his drink before feet clattered on the stairs.

He watched them come into the room. The little girl was tiny. She looked like a Christmas doll who'd come to life — a blonde doll, with wheaten pig-tails and the biggest, bluest eyes Sam had ever seen. She clung to Jill's hand, pressing close to Jill's legs. And when Jill said, "Say hello, dear," she regarded Sam with a brief, distrusting stare, and then buried her face in Jill's apron.

Sam said, "Hello, Gretchen."

"And this is Paul," said Jill.

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The boy was older. About six, Sam thought. He was fair and slender, though there was a sturdiness in the way he held himself. His eyes were puzzled and apprehensive. He came forward, a little hesitant. And suddenly he thrust out his hand.

"How do you do, sir," he said.

Sam said, "Hello, Paul."

He winced, for the boy's fierce, small grip had closed on the raw flesh of his palm. "Easy does it," he said, turning his hand to the light. "This's a little on the tender side."

"I'm sorry," the boy began.

Sam said, "Forget it."

"Have you been digging, sir?"

"Digging?" Sam gave the boy a thoughtful look. "Yes," he said, at last, "you might call it digging."

"I remember when Tony —"

"Tell me about him some other time," Sam said.

The boy's eyes became big. He said, "Yes, sir," in a faint, small voice and turned blindly away. Jill McCann took his hand. Gently, she said, "Mr. Gallagher is tired, Paul. Perhaps you and Gretchen had best run along upstairs and play. Mr. Gallagher'll feel better tomorrow. We'll have a long talk then."

Paul tried to smile. "Righto, Mother."

Jill went with them as they left the room. Sam heard the wordless murmur of their voices in the hall. He rolled the glass in his hands, liking the cold feel of it against his flesh. And Jill McCann came back.

"The boy won't do," said Sam.

Her eyes widened. "You're blunt enough."

"Bluntness saves time, McCann. I've nothing against

Paul. He's a nice kid. But he's at an awkward age. He'll make friends with anyone who smiles at him. He'll talk." Sam looked up at her. "The little girl — that Gretchen — is all right. She couldn't give the show away if she tried."

"What about me?" Jill asked stiffly.

He said, "You're angry. You think a lot of the boy; that's as it should be." He put the glass on the table. "There's nothing personal in what I say, McCann. I've got a job to do. I can't take a chance with anything, or anyone who might mess it up for me. Your children —"

Jill said, "I have no children."

"Paul called you mother. He —"

"I asked him to," she said.

Sam drew a deep breath. "I've been hammered around today," he said. "I'm so tired I'm punchy. But I would like to know what goes on. How's for some explanation?"

"They're refugee children."

He nodded. "That accounts for the accent."

"They were assigned to me — to us." She looked steadily at a spot above his head. "There's a phone at your elbow. You can get the details from Mr. Thane."

"I'll do that," said Sam.

He heard the door close softly behind her as he dialed. Then Thane was speaking, and somehow the lean competence of the man was in his precise, dry voice.

"This time you're wrong," said Sam.

"How?" said Thane. "Why?"

"Paul's at the noisy age. He'll talk."

"Is this your idea? Or Jill's?"

Sam Gallagher said, "Mine."

"How did the new job go?"

"Wait a minute!" Sam's voice turned rough. "Let's

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take care of one item at a time. What about the boy?"

"He's there. He stays there."

Sam Gallagher said, "Thanks, friend."

"You're jumping at shadows," said Thane patiently. "Or simply feeling sorry for yourself. The children are in Jill's charge. I suggest you remember that." He paused. Then, "Did you learn anything in the yard today?"

Sam did not answer at once. He looked down at his blistered hand; bitterness pulled at his mouth. "Yes," he said finally, "but nothing you could use."

Thane chuckled. "Was it that bad?"

"I'd like to get you down there."

"I think I know why," said Thane. "But you'll feel better after you've had a hot bath and some sleep." He chuckled again. "And, Sam, give my regards to Mrs. Gallagher and the children."

"How would you like to go to —"

Sam Gallagher stopped there, for the phone had gone dead in his hands. He pushed the instrument away. Scowling, he pillowed his head on his forearms. He saw the door swing to let Jill McCann slip through. She did not come into the room, but pressed her shoulders against the door panel. Her hands flattened there, fingers wide-splayed — white starfish pinned to dark wood. Her voice was a husky whisper.

"There's a man coming up the walk."

"Probably a peddler." Sam did not move. "He'll want to sell you a brush, or a gadget for the kitchen."

"He's not a peddler."

Sam lifted his head. "Yes?"

"I watched him hunt for this house number."

"What's he look like?"

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"Big," she said. "Almost fat. He's wearing overalls, a leather jacket, and a tin shipyard helmet."

"Glasses?"

"Maybe," she whispered. "I'm not sure."

"McWhitty? He might —"

She shook her head. "No, I know McWhitty."

Sam Gallagher came out of his chair, shoulders hunched. There was woodenness in the planes of his face, save for the inward crook of his lips.

"I'd better look," he said.

And the doorbell rang.

He crossed the room to Jill's side. She put her weight briefly against the door. It gave, and in the instant of its swinging Sam had a glimpse of the man on the porch — a thickset, solid man whose face was nidden in a blur of shadow.

"He's new to me," Sam said.

Jill wet her lips. "Could they —"

"Relax," he said. "It's probably a mistake."

"What are you going to do?"

He grinned at her. "Talk to him. What else?"

She whispered, "Be careful —"

He brushed her shoulder in passing; he felt the wary tautness in the rock-hard flesh of her. He had one swift thought: A hell of a job for a woman! Then he was crossing the living room to the entrance hall. The bell rang again, sharply insistent, just as he opened the door.

"You wanted something?" he said.

This man was bigger than McWhitty. He carried his weight in his shoulders, thighs, and in the heavy legs. He held a slip of paper in one hand; his eyes flicked down

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to it and up again. His mouth held the shape of a smile.

"Your name's Gallagher?" he said.

"Yes?"

"You work for Seaboard? On the lead-off?"

"That's right," said Sam.

"Swell. I've got a proposition for you."

Sam Gallagher said, "I'll listen."

The big man moved a little. His glance went past Sam to the hall, the living room. "Nice place you got here," he said. "Looks comfortable."

"It is."

"Your rent must be steep."

"No," said Sam, "not very."

There was cool insolence in the big man's eyes. His smile widened. "I got a bottle along," he said. "I like to have me a drink after work. I could swap you a slug of whiskey for a little water to mix —"

"Is that your proposition?"

The man laughed. "Hell, no. But we could talk —"

"I'm on the wagon," said Sam.

Something that might have been regret flicked across the big man's eyes. "My name's Parrish," he said. "Dave Parrish. I live near here. I got a friend in the Personnel Office, an' I asked him to let me know when a new guy came to work that lived in my neighborhood."

"He gave you my name?"

"That's right. An' here's my idea: you drive to work, an' so do I. So we're wearin' out two sets of tires, usin' up two tanks of gas. I thought we could make a deal where we'd take turns. You ride with me one day; I ride with you the next."

Sam said, "Sorry, I have no car."

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"The hell you say." If Parrish was surprised it didn't show in his face. "Well, we can still work somethin' out. You can ride back and forth with me. You can pay me what it'd cost you to ride the street-car."

"Suppose I think it over?"

"What's there to think over? As long's you're on the lead-off you'll have a hell of a time gettin' to work without you ride with somebody."

"I can always hitch-hike," said Sam.

A door opened somewhere inside the house; there was the sound of light, quick steps. Paul came into the hall, his small face grave. And a cold rage touched Sam Gallagher. She would louse it up! he thought. She let the kid get away. He'll open his mouth and —

Heartily, Parrish said, "Hello, sonny."

"How do you do," the boy replied.

Sam bent his head. "Well, Paul?"

The boy looked up, smiling. He took Sam's hand. "Mother sent me to tell you dinner's ready."

"Fine, let's go eat it."

"This deal —" Parrish began.

"I'll let you know. On the job."

Sam Gallagher closed the door. Quietly, the boy disengaged his hand and moved through the shadowed hall. An automobile starter made a noisy grinding in the street. Sam went out to the kitchen. Jill McCann waited in the alcove there, her arms around the children, a dark question in her eyes.

"They move fast," he said.

Her eyes grew round. "I heard most of what he said. How can you be so sure he was —"

"Little pitchers."

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Main

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He leaned back against the drainboard and closed his eyes. She'd get it, or she wouldn't. Either way, it didn't matter much. He was bone-tired, groggy with exhaustion, and about through for the day. He heard her whisper to the children, warmth in the soft run of her voice. Paul said, "Of course, Mother," and when Sam looked up they had gone.

Jill McCann said, "Well?"

"That ride business was a gag," he told her. "The guy wanted to come in and look around. The trick was to get rid of him without getting tough. You scared the hell out of me, but you brought it off."

She shook her head. "Paul did."

"You sent him out there and told him what to say. So it was the two of you." He gave her a ragged grin. "I'm sure this was a purely routine check. I'm new on the Seaboard crew. I know absolutely nothing about the work. So I'm a stand-out. Our friends are on the watch for anyone who looks like a plant." He drew a deep breath. "They sent Parrish out to check."

"He might have been really hunting for a man to ride with him," Jill insisted. "It sounds reasonable."

"Not to me, McCann."

"He got your name and address from —"

"— from a friend in the Personnel Office," Sam cut in. "And that's the rub. Jeff gave me a badge. He took me through the gate. Personnel hasn't had my name yet. This address isn't on file."

"Then he followed you here!" she whispered.

"Or a stooge did. And called Parrish."

Her lips drew thin. "They do move fast."

"Don't worry about it, McCann. This check-up was

expected. That's why you're here. Parrish found what he was supposed to find: a family man who'd gone to work in the shipyard. He won't look further."

"I hope you're right," Jill said.

"We've got company, McCann."

He said it sourly and nodded at the inner door. It stood a little ajar, held so by someone on the other side. There was a scurry of movement, a fierce, small whispering, and then the grave face of the boy appeared in the opening.

Jill said, "Yes, Paul?"

"I remembered something, Mother."

"Come in," said Sam wearily. "Tell us."

Jill threw him an angry look. Then the children were in the room. Gretchen stayed close to Paul's side, distrust in her blue stare. The boy held a bottle and a square of soft white cloth.

"I remembered when Tony was digging," he said. "His hands got sore and blistered, too. He put oil on them; he said it helped lots. I found this, and I —"

"Is that oil?" said Sam.

The boy swallowed. "Yes, sir."

"You brought it down for me?"

"Yes — yes, I did," Paul blurted.

A flush of color darkened his face. He thrust the bottle and cloth into Sam's hands. He stammered something and bolted, Gretchen trotting sturdily in his wake. Sam Gallagher turned to look at Jill.

"I'll be totally damned," he said.

"You should be," she replied.

"Who's this Tony he talks about?"

"An older brother."

"And this digging?"

"That was in London, in '39. After Munich. War was coming and the bombers were coming and all England knew it. Remember?" Jill did not look at him now. "So much had to be done and there was so little time. The people dug trenches and air-raid shelters in St. James and Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. Tony helped—"

He said, "Wait, McCann!"

She went on as if she hadn't heard. "He was seventeen and he wanted to do his share. He joined the R.A.F. as soon as they'd take him; he traded his shovel for a Spitfire. When the Blitz came he was flying. Just a kid, doing a nasty job against odds far too big. He got two of their bombers and a fighter before his luck ran out."

"He was killed?" Sam said.

"Yes. Shot down over the Channel."

"Paul's people? What about them?"

She moved her shoulders. "Gone. Blitzed."

Carefully, he said, "Gretchen? How did she —"

Her head came up. There was scorn in the look she had for him. "You wouldn't be interested, Mr. Gallagher. You've a job to do. You can't afford to think of anything but that."

"Go on, McCann. Rub my nose in it."

"Humbleness doesn't become you," she said.

"Lord! When Gallagher makes a mistake he really goes first class." The rough set of his mouth broke, turning down. "Thane sent me into the shipyard. I had to work with my back and my hands. I decided I was being pushed around and I didn't like it. I couldn't hit back at Thane." He paused. "It looks like I took it out on you and the kids."

PILEBUCK

II

"Blisters bring out the best in you."

"They bring out something. Give Gallagher an ache or a pain and he can't see the woods for trees."

"Now you're being big," she said.

"And you're being nasty." His mouth held a wry twist. "I'm trying to apologize, McCann. Will you ask the children to come down here again, please?"

"Why, yes," she said, surprised.

He waited, motionless and silent, holding himself against the pull of weariness. He found a smile for the children when Jill McCann brought them in. Gretchen hid in Jill's apron; all Sam could see of her was one round, distrusting eye. Paul let go of Jill's hand and moved out in front of her. Somehow, it was as if he denied himself the comfort of her hand-clasp to face whatever was to come alone. Sam Gallagher blinked. There was a sudden stinging in his eyes. He went down to one knee.

"Paul," he said, "let's start all over."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Let's shake hands," Sam said, his voice deep and gentle. "And I want to tell you how glad I am to have you here. I overlooked that, at first. I was — well, I was a little upset. I forgot my manners."

Gravely, the boy said, "That's all right, sir."

"You're not angry with me?"

"No, sir, I'm not."

"Okay," said Sam. "Shake."

A shy smile touched the boy's lips. He offered his hand, saying, "I won't squeeze, sir. Not this time." And Sam Gallagher swallowed before he could speak. He took the boy's hand in both his own. "We won't worry

about a few blisters now. The point is we're glad you're here. You won't forget that, will you, Paul?"

Paul's smile widened. "No, I won't forget."

"Ever see a baseball game, Paul?"

The boy shook his head.

"We'll have to go to one. Soon."

"I — I'd like that, sir."

"It's a date," said Sam. "I —"

He stopped then. Gretchen had left Jill's side to come toward him. More than ever she looked like a Christmas doll — chubby legs, pig-tails, round, blue eyes. She made no sound but stood close beside Sam Gallagher, her shoulder touching his arm.

He said, "Hello, there."

"She doesn't talk much," Paul said.

Sam Gallagher grinned. "It doesn't matter. With her hair and eyes, she'll do okay without saying a word."

Paul said, "I think she likes you."

"I hope so," said Sam. "I really do."

"Will you tell me about baseball, sir?"

"I'm pretty tir—" Sam paused. "Why not?"

Jill McCann broke in to say, "Mr. Gallagher's had a hard day, children. And he hasn't eaten yet."

He said, "This'll just take a minute."

He made a diamond on the floor. Matches became players. The children crowded close to watch and listen. Interest was bright in Paul's eyes. And it was a full half hour before Sam Gallagher sat back on his haunches. "That's it," he said. "That gives you a rough idea."

"I might like that game," Paul said soberly.

"Sure," said Sam. "Everybody does."

Jill said, "Come along now, children."

Paul said, "Yes, Mother," and took Gretchen's hand. When they reached the door, he turned to say, "Thank you, sir. We'll have another talk tomorrow."

"That we will," said Sam.

He was still sitting on the floor when Jill came back. She was smiling now; her eyes were soft.

"You can be nice," she said.

He grinned. "The old Gallagher charm."

"Please," she said. "Don't spoil it now."

He climbed to his feet awkwardly. The hurting stiffness had spread to his back, his arms, his thighs. He tried to get out of his jacket and then gave it up, wincing at the pain the effort cost.

"I'm a ruin," he said. "I'm coming apart."

"May I help?" Jill asked.

"You might run a tub of hot water."

"Of course," she said. "Right away."

He followed her up the stairs. She went into the bathroom; he made a tour of the bedrooms. In the first, a large, many-windowed room, he found the children playing quietly. A bunk-bed set stood against one wall, twin chests of drawers against another. Sam said, "Hi, kids," and closed the door on Paul's answering smile.

There were two other bedrooms — small, square, and side-by-side. His unopened bag stood in one; the other was obviously Jill's room. Dresses made a swirl of color across a chair there; her shoes marched in a pert row along the closet wall. A nightgown, a sheer bit of silken froth, lay upon the bed. Sam Gallagher scowled and poked at it with an experimental finger. Then he went down the hall to the bathroom. He watched Jill McCann take towels from a linen closet there.

PILEBUCK

II

"We'll have to make some changes," he said.

"Changes?"

"In the sleeping arrangements. We're supposed to be man and wife. Maybe you haven't heard, McCann, but in most families the husband and wife use the same room."

Her mouth tightened. "If you think —"

"Let me finish," he said, smiling. "We've got to look married — more so than any married couple in the city. I'll sleep in one room, you sleep in the other. But our clothes must hang in the same closet." He tipped his head. "That's stage dressing, McCann. Insurance. If anyone gets up here to have a look around they'll find things as they should be."

"I understand," she said faintly.

He said, "Good. Now there's one other thing. You may hear me in your room some night after you've gone to bed. Don't scream. I —"

"I won't. I'll knock you cold!"

He laughed. "You'll have to have a long reach, McCann. I'll be in there because I've heard the doorbell, or the phone. I'll have to turn on the light in your room so it will — well, so it will look right."

"You can reach the light switch from the hall," she said grimly. "You don't have to come into my room."

"Then I won't," he said. "Depend on it."

Jill said, "I'll help you with that jacket now."

And she did, in spite of his protests. When he tried to bend over to untie his shoes, she knelt and did that for him too.

"The sweat-shirt next," she said.

"Now look —" he began.

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Coolly, she said, "Bend over."

Still protesting, he obeyed. She yanked the sweat-shirt off, over his head, and dropped it in a sodden heap on the floor. He straightened, swaying a little on wide-planted feet. He managed a full grin.

"From here out it's censored."

Jill McCann blushed furiously.

He shook his head. "On second thought, I'll take that back," he said. "I'm bushed. I'm going to need all the strength I've got left to get to that tub. So why be fancy. I'm going to take a bath with my pants on!"

Sam Gallagher was the tip of a nose just showing beneath a confused heap of blankets, when Jill McCann turned on the light in his room the next morning. Jill looked at the nose a long moment.

There is something personal about a man's sleep. It's like his toothbrush, or his underwear — it's none of your business unless you've known him years. And Jill had known Sam Gallagher less than a day. In fact, no more than an hour. He'd eaten and gone straight to bed. Collapsed in bed. Jill smiled a little remembering that.

"Mr. Gallagher —" she called.

The nose might have twitched, but the main heap didn't move. Jill was glad, for the "Mr." didn't seem to fit. That was the sort of thing a wife used on her husband in moments of great stress — brained him with it when he came home tight, or missed dinner, or dropped his check in a crap game.

She tried, "Sam —" with no more success.

Impatiently, with high color in her cheeks, she crossed

PILEBUCK

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to the bed and shook him. First timidly, then vigorously, and at last Sam groaned. He made deep, plaintive noises and turtled his head under the covers.

"It's three-thirty," Jill said. "Get up."

Sam said, "A peevee's got a point on the end of it, and a hook on the side of it, and a handle —"

"What?" Jill said.

"Jack-hammer —" Sam said.

He snored contentedly.

Jill jerked the covers off him. She pushed his head around and Sam didn't mind that. She caught his arm and dragged him upright, but he fell back when she let go. Then she pulled his feet to the side of the bed and dragged him up again. This time, with his feet on the floor, he did not fall. He woke gradually. His tousled head was in his hands, his elbows on his knees; and Jill, watching, had no way of knowing how it was with him.

There was a knife in the back of his neck. He could feel it there, quite plainly, just at the top of his shoulders, and when he moved his head the point grated on bone and the pain of it ran down across his shoulder-blades like the flow of thick oil. His muscles were inhabited by pixies — screw-ball pixies, who went nuts when Sam tried to move and jabbed at his muscles with pitchforks. Red-hot pitchforks, Sam decided. He flopped back on the bed.

"Get me Thane," he said.

"Why Thane?"

"I want him here. That Judas, that fugitive from an Inquisition — he can't do this to me. I'll strangle him. I'll snap his bones with my bare hands. I'll cut his throat." He blew his breath out.

"Mother," he whispered, "I'm too young to die."

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Jill said, "It's a quarter to four."

Sam Gallagher grinned at her from under half-closed eyelids. She wore a bright print housecoat. There was a lot of blue in the pattern. The blue went up into her grey eyes and turned them blue. Her nose was shiny, and her cheeks and the small point of her chin. She'd just touched her hair at the temples with a damp brush. Sam liked that. He liked the way she fit her housecoat, the way she held it tight here and there. Very nice.

"Will I do?" she asked.

"Dunno," he said. "Can you cook?"

"Oh!" Her eyes were suddenly wide. "Your toast!"
She vanished into the kitchen.

There was wind and rain. Long files of men were moving through the main gate when Sam Gallagher arrived. A guard looked at his badge, inspected his lunch-box, and passed him through. Once inside, Sam struck off to the south. Others were heading that way. Sam recognized the grinning Ikey, the tall, lank Calaban.

"That water'll be cold today," said Sam.

"Freeze the tail off a billy-goat," Ikey said.

Dourly, Calaban said, "That's right. But we ain't got it so bad. We c'n head for the fire once in a while. Think how it is for the guys that get one o' these boats blown out from under 'em. They really got it cold."

"You ain't just sayin' that," Ikey said.

For a time there was silence. They passed a half-dozen shipways — passed a cruiser in the building, a mine-layer, a carrier. And still the lights of the tool shack were far ahead of them.

PILEBUCK

II

"A man walks his feet off clear to the ankles around here." Ikey's small face puckered in a grin. "Takes me longer to get from the gate to the job than it does to get from my house to the gate."

"Good exercise," said Calaban.

Ikey snorted. "How do you like that? 'Exercise,' he says, an' me worked to a frazzle now. I got a notion to start me a bus line inside the yard. This joint never stops, day or night. I'd have plenty of customers clean around the clock — fifty thousand of 'em. I'd make dough!"

"Ike," said Calaban, "you're all mouth."

Ikey sighed. "That what my old lady says."

Sam Gallagher put his lunchbox on the shelf with the others and sat down carefully on the bench. Slow and easy, that was the way to do it. If you moved fast the pain woke and grabbed you, and then you were rattling with pain. He sat there and watched Kelly put on his boots.

He remembered Joe Trindall then, the time Joe had taken him back stage in that shabby mouse-trap of a theater in Brussels. That had been before the war, before they kicked hell out of Rotterdam, or any of that. Joe's flame of the moment had danced in a ballet, and though Sam couldn't recall her face he remembered the way she put on her slippers. It was almost a ritual, the careful business of lacing and testing and getting them just right.

And Kelly was doing the same thing. He laced the left boot twice before it suited him. Then he stood up and rocked back and forth on the caulks, springing his weight on his toes. Sam thought there was much of the ballet in Kelly's feet, in their clean, trim lines, in the fluid

way Kelly used them. And Sam went on then, just for the hell of it, to put Kelly in a ballet skirt. The idea was wonderful. Especially when you thought of the red hair on Kelly's chest. When Kelly turned you got an even better view — hairy shoulders, big hands, and a bald spot like a pancake on the back of his head.

Impersonally, Kelly said, "How's she goin'?"

"Just right," Sam answered.

Kelly took his top-maul out into the morning darkness, and Brownie came in. Brownie looked like a big, contented seal — not a very bright seal, Sam thought, but one who'd had plenty of fish for breakfast and looked forward to an allday's swim. Brownie shook the water from his rain-hat and smiled at Sam.

"That's a fine rain," he said.

Sam said, "Wonderful."

Brownie chuckled. "To me it is." He had a soft voice touched with a faint accent. "My people come from Nebraska. I know what it's like when it never rains."

A gust of wind shoved the door open and water dribbled across the floor. Sam looked that way wearily. He thought of a couple of wisecracks, but the effort of putting them in words was too much. He twisted his head against the pain at the back of his neck. It was going to be tough out there, plenty tough. He closed his eyes.

"I almost killed you yesterday," he said.

"With the spiking gun." Brownie's big shoulders shrugged. "I've had close ones before. You get used to them in this work, or you get out of it. I'll be around a long time."

Sam said, "I'd have been sore as hell."

"No you wouldn't." Brownie bent over his toolbox.

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"Your name's Gallagher?" Sam said it was, and Brownie said, "Jeff wants you to fill out your death warrant."

"What's this?" Sam asked.

Brownie laughed. "Not what you think. It's that who-to-notify-in-case-of-an-accident business. Your employment record. The girl in the office will fix you up any time. Now, if you want."

Sam groaned as he stood up.

"Breaking in?" Brownie asked.

"Breaking up," Sam answered.

The time office was a board and tar-paper shack. A one-room affair, with a rough counter across one end, and a rough desk under the window. A single, shaded globe dropped a pool of light around the girl at the desk and left Sam Gallagher in the bank of darkness at the counter.

The girl said, "Be with you in a moment."

Sam Gallagher leaned on the counter.

"Lea," he said. "Lea Damaron."

The girl's pencil stopped.

"Sam," she said.

She looked up, but not at him. Her eyes were on the black window. There was little in her face. Surprise, perhaps, but no feeling — no gladness, no anger.

Seven years, Sam thought.

Good years for Lea Damaron. Sam Gallagher's throat ached. He looked down at his hands and saw them shake. Funny the way he'd fallen into this. All the things he'd planned for their meeting were gone. He'd planned them years ago, when they'd parted; he'd forgotten them years ago. Now he was empty.

"Jeff didn't tell me you were here," he said.

"I didn't know about you, either."

This was a new Lea. The one he'd known before he'd carried with him. As a sort of escape mechanism, an image to conjure up when he was sick to death of what he had around him. In the field hospital outside Madrid, she'd come to stand at his bedside, and say, "Every week you fix that Ford, every week it runs worse. We'll go to the dance on the bus, or we won't go —" Saddle Oxfords, a page boy bob, a sport skirt. Pretty much kid, but a good kid with a grin for everybody. That was the Lea Dameron of seven years ago.

This Lea was different. Different and better. The page boy was gone, and there were curls now, close-cropped, taffy-colored curls. There was a grown-up something in her brown eyes, a cool sureness in the long line of her mouth. She wore a tailored suit, a tan coat pulled around her shoulders against the morning cold. She still did not look at Sam Gallagher, and when she spoke her voice was just a little tired.

"What do you want, Sam?"

"I'm working here. For Jeff. Pilebuck."

"Working here —" she said.

And Sam knew he'd disappointed her.

"Sure," he said. "I needed a job. Everything's pretty well shot with the war on. If you want a job these days, you go to the shipyards. There was Jeff, and he could put me to work. So why not?"

"Of course, why not?" Lea echoed.

She made meaningless marks with her pencil, bending her head a little so that shadow came across her face.

"I know what you wanted." He pushed his hat back and rubbed the rain from his forehead. "I had it, too. Parts of it, anyway, at different times. I had a big white

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horse to come riding up on, but at the last moment I traded it off for a clean pair of socks. And there was a castle — a castle on a hill with a moat around it and a wall — just right for two people. But the man said I had to have ten per cent down or the FHA wouldn't handle it."

Quietly, Lea said, "What do you look like?"

Sam thought about that a moment.

"You could turn around," he said.

She shook her head.

"It's that bad, eh?" He lit a cigarette and tried to grin. "Let's see. Take Gable, or Tracy, or Powell. Take Tracy, say. Give him a good forehead — not bald, just high — give him a little more muscle around the middle, a little more dash, a little more charm. There you have me. I mean, rent me a suit of clothes and you could take me anywhere."

"Very funny," she said.

He went around the counter. He moved some papers and sat on the desk at her elbow. "Come on," he said.

He cupped her chin with his palm and drew her head up. Her face came up, but not her eyes. He was able, then, to see her closely, and because she didn't look at him he had time to do a job of it.

The line of her face was good, a clean, well-cared-for line. Maturity had indeed done well by her. Poise was there, even under his close inspection, and the sweep of her lashes was dark across each cheek. A straight nose, a full, red mouth, hair close-cut and soft to touch. And Sam touched her hair; he couldn't help doing it.

"Wonderful," he said. "Now me —"

Her eyes were clear and dark brown. Cool. They

looked at him deliberately, missing nothing, and showed little of what they felt.

They saw his battered felt hat, the tousled red hair on the forward side of it, his disreputable jacket, his dirty cords. The scar deep in his forehead was new, the laugh wrinkles at his eye-corners were old, and the wry shape of his smile was old.

She looked at him again, and wished suddenly that she had not looked at all. There was a laugh in his eyes — for her. A young laugh, the kind that stays young in a man's heart. This one was no older than the boy who'd thrown skunk oil in the schoolhouse ventilator. But behind the laugh was something not quite pleasant. Something that had come with his growing up.

He'd been around, this Gallagher. Some of the things he'd done he could be proud of; some he couldn't. Both had left their mark, though neither was alone apparent. Here, she thought, is Gallagher. Here, she almost said to him, is your capacity for doing — either good or evil, I don't know which. But what you find to your liking you'll do thoroughly and hard, because your chin is hard, because when you're not smiling you've got a rough set to your mouth. Keep your distance, Gallagher. I don't trust you.

She said, "You need a shave."

Gallagher laughed. "After seven years — this!"

And a whistle blew out in the night, above the half-completed ships. Lea lifted her head and looked questioningly at Sam.

"That's your shift, isn't it?"

Sam nodded. "But I can't go until I fill out my death warrant. It's what I came for."

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Lea gave him a blank and a pencil. She got up to stand with her back to the heat of a small oil stove.

"Still like to swim in the rain?" he asked.

That had been in a long ago August — late August. And clouds, the first of a long summer, piled high in the sky. The two of them, Lea and Sam Gallagher, had had the lake to themselves, swimming far out until the shore was lost in the haze of evening. The rain had caught them there — a great, drumming rain, and with it had come a flood of fear, excitement, and a wild exhilaration that was like the surge of strong drink. All that was young in her had been alive, vibrant; all that was female had been in her eyes, and she'd known it, but it hadn't mattered. Nothing had mattered except the two of them and being together — the kiss he gave her, the wet touch of his lips, the thrust of his legs, the cool swirl of water between them, and the burning of desire. She'd bitten his lips and fought away from him with a shake of her wet head — with a laugh for him as he grinned at her — and they'd raced together in crazy circles just for the very hell of it.

She looked at him now. Suddenly, the past seven years and all their wanting were gone. Tousled red hair, a wry grin, the unpredictable deviltry that lived in his eyes — to her this was the same Sam Gallagher. The warmth she felt was in her smile.

Huskily, she said, "I'm glad you're back."

"Lea —" Sam Gallagher came erect. There was an unhappy drag to his lips. "Look, Lea, I —"

The door pushed open. It was Jeff Gallagher, his rain clothes shining and wet; his lean face sober in the faint light.

PILEBUCK

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"Are you going to work?" he asked.

Tiredly, Sam said, "Sure, Jeff."

He gave the form to Lea Damaron. He watched her put it on the desk under the light, watched her read it.

He said, "I'm sorry, Lea."

Lea's eyes came up, wide and hurt, to search Sam's face. This was their moment — their problem — and Jeff was out of it, in the darkness by the counter.

Sam said, "Let's talk about it at lunch."

"Sam!" she breathed.

Her mind was frozen. It was an age before she could move or speak again. Through the long silence Sam looked at her, a troubled twist to his mouth and no help in his eyes. And there was Jeff, in the corner, to see this thing and what it did to her.

She looked at the paper again.

"You're married, Sam," she said faintly. "You've got two children. How — how nice —"

And she turned her back on him.

"Sam!" Jeff spoke harshly from the counter. "I've got work waiting for you. In the water!"

CHAPTER TWO

SAM and Jeff had gone. Lea Dameron stood by the oil stove now, her elbows on top of it. Heat boiled up around her face. She turned her head this way and that, until it became too much for her. Then she went back to the window and looked at her reflection on the black pane. Her nose was shiny; her hair could stand a comb.

You're twenty-five, she told herself.

And somehow that was a bitter thought. Ten more years and she'd be thirty-five — her life half gone and nothing done yet. No husband, no kids. But Sam had two. Suddenly, she wanted to see his children, wanted to see his wife. Then, just as suddenly, she changed her mind. There was no good reason for wanting to see them — just a mean hope that the kids would have buck teeth, that the wife was fat and forty. Even that wouldn't help. What she really wanted was to hurt Sam the way he'd hurt her.

The door opened and Jeff Gallagher came in. He shook the rain from his hat, doing a very careful job of it. He put his hat on the counter. His shadowed face was grave.

"I should have told you," he said.

"Yes," she said, "I wish you had."

"I tried, Lea. I came in here a dozen times, just for that. But I couldn't. I was scared, I guess." He lifted one hand. "If I'd said anything I'd've had to go the whole way. Part of it wasn't mine to tell."

"Have you seen them, Jeff."

"His family? No, Lea."

"I just wondered," she said.

And for a time there was silence, save for the contented sighing of the wind, the faint drum of rain on the windows. Jeff Gallagher frowned; his eyes were troubled.

"Lea — look." His voice was clouded, husky. "Does it matter such a hell of a lot? I mean, what's this guy to you? After seven years — damn it, Lea, what could he mean?"

She did not move or speak.

"Seven years ago it was Sam. The last three it's been me. I'm not a man to walk off a rig, just because the last pile goes down hard." He laid his brown hands flat on the counter. "You love him or you don't."

She said, "Stop this, Jeff!"

"He's got two kids, Lea. A wife's not so bad. But kids —" He shook his head. "You can't chase a man with two kids."

"Do you think I would?"

"And what about me?" he asked. "I've been keeping your nose tidy for a long time now. I bail you out of the clink when you get tossed in for reckless driving. I fix your parking tickets. I get up in the middle of the night and come running with a hot-water bottle. I pay your rent when you blow your check for a new hat. And why?" he asked. "Because I'm going to marry you, if you'll hold still long enough."

"Maybe I will — sometime." She tried to smile. "But thanks for asking, Jeff."

He came around the counter; he caught both her hands in his. For a moment she tried to pull away, then gave it up. Her shoulders sagged. Her face became tired and older than it should have been. She leaned her forehead against his shoulder.

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"There are times," she whispered, "when you're a comfort to a gal."

"I know," said Jeff. "It's tough."

She rubbed her cheek against his coat. "You can't just put a thing like that away and forget it, Jeff. It — well, it's part of you, like your leg. You try to do without it, but you miss it. It's your leg and you want it back." She let her breath go ruefully. "But that's one leg I'll never use again —"

Jeff said, "How did he seem to you?"

"What do you mean?"

"He wasn't the same, was he?"

"He's been around. He's older."

She stepped back and away. Her eyes found his face, and he colored a little under her steady gaze. Roughly, he said, "He's my brother, kid. I don't run down my own — you know that. I'm asking if you saw what I saw?"

"He's changed."

"Sure," said Jeff, "but how?"

She thought a moment. "It's in his eyes, I think. Something — I don't know if it's good or bad."

"Yeah." Jeff tipped his head in a troubled way. "That guy's tough, Lea. Tougher, maybe, than any man on the job. Inside, I mean. Where it counts."

"I'd say that was good."

"Sure, it's good. But here's something that's not." Jeff made a slow job of finding a cigarette. "Sam was a newspaper man before the war. It seems like the newspaper business ought to be going great guns now. They've got plenty to write about. But Sam's out of a job. If he doesn't work for me, he doesn't eat — or so he says."

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Jeff shook his head. "It's a haywire rig, Lea. That Sam never flopped at anything."

"Why not ask him about it?"

"I did."

Lea frowned. "You could fire him."

"No," said Jeff, and there was a stubborn tightening at the corners of his mouth. "Not in this game. You give a man a break, Lea. Any man. Where he came from and what he's done is his business. What he does on the job is your business. If he can make the grade you owe him a job. That's the system." Jeff shrugged. "Sam's damned good for a green hand."

"All right," said Lea. "I give up."

"That won't help."

"Well? What could I do?"

"A man will talk to a woman," said Jeff.

"Jeff!" Lea gasped. "I won't!"

Quietly, Jeff said, "Sure, you will —"

Sam Gallagher stood by the fire. Kelly was off in the darkness somewhere — "Bull-cookin'," Ikey said. "That guy rests at a dead run —" Ikey and the rest of the crew stood with Sam Gallagher, soaking up heat and watching the gauge-board.

Sam Gallagher liked the gauge-board. Ikey had made it to show the height of the tide, and he'd marked it with calibrations of his own invention. Just now, the water stood close to, "Hell — it's high water!" The next mark down, "Tough-going!" showed only when a passing boat threw a bow wave. "Can do!" did not show at all, and "Gravy-Train!" was something they'd never seen.

Jeff Gallagher came out of the darkness with Kelly to

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stand at the water's edge. Kelly said, "Put Ikey in that water, out there where the work is, an' he could drink without bendin' over."

Jeff nodded. "It's a hold-up."

Sam said, "Ikey, is that good?"

Ikey's small, rain-streaked face puckered in a grin. "A hold-up," he said, "means maybe she ain't goin' low enough for sawin'."

Someone said, "That *is* good!"

Jeff Gallagher consulted his tide-table. "Tomorrow morning's low tide looks about right," he said finally.

"Let's rig her today," Kelly said, "and give her hell tomorrow."

Explosively, Ikey said, "I'll kill that Kelly!"

Jeff's grin flashed in the rain. "You lads with the long arms — Sam, Bevins, Brownie, Kelly — nail the straight-edges on the next two bents. The rest bull-cook for them. Ikey, you'd better sit by the fire."

"Hell with that fire stuff!" Ikey said.

And he yelled like an Indian. He made a running dive at Kelly and landed on Kelly's shoulders. Clinging there he jerked Kelly's hat off, pounded him on top of the head. Kelly reached up and peeled Ikey off his back the way he'd peel out of a shirt. He chucked Ikey out in the river. Ikey struggled through the air and splashed in on his backsides. He came up spluttering.

"Don't stand there!" he bellowed at Kelly. "Hand me a straight-edge!"

Kelly said, "Keep your pants on."

He caught up a load of straight-edges and slogged out into the muddy water. Brownie and Bevins followed. Sam Gallagher took a hitch at his belt and waded in.

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"Good God!" he said, when the water reached his belly. It was as if someone had slugged him below the belt.

Bevins gave him a tight grin.

"Tougher'n all hell," he said.

Bevins was a young ex-logger. He had big shoulders, clean grey eyes, and a body hardened by years of timber-falling. If it was tough for him, it was tough for anyone. That helped Sam a little.

Kelly pushed a short piece of board across the water to Sam. "Nail 'er on," he said.

"Nail her on where?" Sam asked.

Kelly said something out of the side of his mouth. Brownie, big-shouldered and solid, turned to look at Sam. He chuckled. Sam Gallagher felt blood surging in his face. He pushed through the water to where Kelly stood.

"If you want to ride me," he told Kelly harshly, "do it so I can hear you!"

Kelly looked Sam over with cool, green eyes.

"He wasn't riding you," Brownie said.

Kelly said, "Maybe I was."

"Stop it!" Brownie told him. He turned to Sam. "Kelly told me to get a load of the way you're holding your belly in. It's funny. Sure. But it's no worse than the way I look. Or Ikey, there, with his eyes popping. Don't be so touchy, man. This ice water grabs anybody where they live."

Kelly regarded Sam Gallagher with narrowed eyes. If Sam wanted to accept Brownie's explanation, it was all right with Kelly. But if Sam wanted to kick it around a little, that was even better. He left the choice to Sam.

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Sam said, "Let's get to work."

Some of the tension went out of Kelly's thick shoulders; something that might have been disappointment went through his eyes. Flatly, he said:

"Here's what we do: You see this here nail in the piling? — that's three feet above cut-off. Nail this short piece of straight-edge on the piling under the nail, up and down the piling. The bottom of it's the width of a straight-edge above cut-off. Then you nail a long straight-edge right under it, between that row of piling and this row, fore and aft of the ways. The bottom of that is cut-off. Do the same over there about ten feet. You got two of them, see? Them's your guides. Now you take and nail two more, port and starboard of the ways, one on each side of this here row of piling, snug up under your guides. The top of them is cut-off, on the money. You leave 'em there, and tear the rest off —"

He pushed back his hat. "And if you know any more'n you did before, I'll buy Ikey a pint."

To Ikey, Sam said, "He owes you a pint."

Kelly said, "Not till I see you do it!"

Anger flickered in Sam Gallagher's eyes. "This one goes here," he said, and spiked the short piece to the piling. "The next one this way —"

And he went on, his mouth savage, thin. Kelly was a smart-talking tramp, a good hand with a top-maul or a peevee. But when it came to straight head-work he was no ball of fire; he couldn't be, or he'd have been a foreman long ago. A guy like that— Damn it to hell, Sam told himself, I can do more thinking by noon Monday than Kelly can do all week!

The work was more than two feet under water. It

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meant driving nails under water, nails he couldn't see, and how many times he hit his fingers he didn't know. Some of the nails he drove bent over, some missed the piling. The straight-edges had a nasty way of popping to the surface when he was sure he'd nailed them to stay. But for all of that he got them on — each one in the right place at the right time. And when he was finished, he came stiffly erect.

"How do you like it?" he asked Kelly.

Kelly scratched his red head.

"Yah, you dirty old man!" Ikey yelled at Kelly. "It took you two days to figure that out!"

"Shut up," Kelly said. "I'll buy your pint."

It was a small point, but it meant something to Sam Gallagher. He'd held his own — for the first time since he'd gone to work. It was a milestone. The first milestone. And in his mind, as he worked, Sam Gallagher walked around and around that milestone, admiring it.

Presently, though, the beauty of it faded in the curtain of rain that streamed incessantly out of the black sky. The cold got to him. It numbed his arms and legs. His glow snuffed out like a match dropped into a gutter. Kelly's "Dog 'er off, gents — let's warm our rumps —" were few and did no good at all. When you're cold through, a blazing fire burns your skin. It leaves your bones as cold as ever.

Ikey said, "Make mine whiskey."

Bevins said, "Give me a woman to put my feet on."

"I'll take a shower," Brownie said. He squeezed water out of his sweat-shirt, and his lips were blue with cold. "I keep thinkin' about the ones they got around here. Lord, I'd stand there and soak."

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"Where're these showers?" Gallagher asked.

"Around and about," said Ikey. "In any Leaderman's section. But they ain't for you, son. They're strictly for brasshats. You get yours in the river."

"Sounds good, though —"

Ikey thought about that. "Maybe a guy could find work in a steam laundry."

Bevins, the ex-logger, said, "Let's open a beauty shop. For nice clean work, you can't beat it. No heavy liftin', no buckin' off piling —"

Kelly said something pleasantly obscene.

"It's an idea," said Sam.

At quitting time, after the whistle blew, Sam dragged himself off through the rain in search of the shower. He went through the main yard. He went past the bows of five half-completed ships, through two assembly bays, slipping and sliding when his caulks struck the steel-plate floor. The Leaderman's shower he found was in one of the loft buildings.

There was a fat man in one of the shower-stalls. He looked hard at the muddy trail Sam Gallagher left across the clean tile. Sam sat down on a bench. Deliberately, he pulled off one boot and dumped a pint of mud and water on the floor. He did the same with the other boot. Then he wrung out his socks. After that, he turned his eyes to the fat man. He gave him a look that was long and not pleasant. The fat man became extremely busy with his washing.

Sam left his shirt, overalls, and underwear over a bank of steam pipes and went under a shower. He was so cold the lukewarm water burned him. He got the heat up gradually, until he'd turned the shower room into a steam

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bath. The fat man hurried out. Sam stayed where he was for a long time. Peace and relaxation came with the heat that worked into his bones. It occurred to him that one comes to a place where the commonest things turn out to be a man's most magnificent blessings.

It was one o'clock when Sam Gallagher reached the main walkway. The day shift's lunch hour was past and a flood of men was spilling onto the work. Sam Gallagher let himself into the press and floated along with it. This was the first time he'd had a good look at the main yard in daylight — the first time he'd seen the thundering immensity of it.

The scaffolding about each ship was bigger than he had ever imagined, and it was hard to tell if the men and machines were eating away, or adding to the up-thrust bones of the ships imprisoned there. The Whirley cranes were like great storks, waddling along on skinny legs. Over one ship — a carrier — two of them were tussling one vast section of steel into place, or fighting with long stretched necks over a piece of the ship's flesh.

A kid had a rivet forge going in the center of the walkway, further on. He wore a school sweater with a letter on it, and Sam Gallagher watched him chuck a glowing rivet high into the scaffolding. The throw was faultless, high-arching, clean. There was something about his stance, the way he threw the rivet, that caught Sam's attention. He watched again. Then he knew — the peculiar way of throwing — the kid was a basketball player, shooting baskets from the center of the floor. Wonderful, Sam Gallagher thought, the way the brats grow up when you need them.

He went on. He found a man standing before a sign-

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board set at the bow of the next ship. The man was tall; he carried a dinner-bucket under his arm, a Leaderman's "L" on his tin hat. He was swearing steadily and hard. Sam Gallagher had a look at the board.

SHIP:	U.S.S. OZARK
KEEL LAID:	SEPT. 1, 1941
LAUNCHING DATE:	APRIL 17, 1942
TOTAL TONNAGE:	9876
TONNAGE TO DATE:	8280
TONNAGE LAST SHIFT:	17

Sam Gallagher said, "You don't like it?"

The tall man stopped cursing and looked down at Sam from his great height. He had brown, melancholy eyes and a long chin.

"It'll be the death of me."

"What's so tough about it?"

"That there, 'Tonnage last shift.' You see what them monkeys done. Seventeen tons!" He spat and wiped his chin. "Yesterday I get sixteen. It's a record, see? I go home and tell the old woman I'm a big shot. So I come to work and there's this. The dirty rats — they must've stowed the anchor chain. They couldn't get that much just hangin' steel!"

Sam grinned and left the man to his cursing. Maybe he wasn't as angry as he sounded. Perhaps he was even a little proud — the *Ozark* was enough to bring pride to anyone.

The hull was nearly done. Lying there, with the scaffolding torn away — with her bow caught in the launch-

ing strap, her sides hung in stay-cables — the great, lean grey length of her had a tied-down restless look. And she was big. God she was big. From her bow back to where she began to swell in cargo space was incredibly far. Sam Gallagher walked that way.

When the hull did swell, it swelled enormously, bulging far out over the supporting keel-blocks, hanging so that it took a multitude of shoring to hold her belly up. Amidships, Gallagher tipped his head back. High up, he saw her rail, above that her bridge, and her flying bridge, higher still. Above them all, the long boom of the Whirley was sweeping back and forth, endlessly busy.

Gallagher's eyes came down. He looked again at the long curve to her bow. She was lanky about the neck, he decided, but somehow she managed a graceful sweep to it. Her stabilizer fin reminded him of the fringe of an old lady's petticoat — a starched fringe, pert and neat. Her screws and rudders, stowed neatly under her stern, were necessary to her life, but not particularly lovely to look at — you were getting personal if you looked too long. Gallagher's eyes followed the line of her bottom, slanting high into the trim turn of her stern. He stood off then, for a look at the whole of her — and a great, breath-taking, lovely girl she was, too. A man could hardly build a thing more beautiful than a ship.

Sam Gallagher went under her stern, and up the port side of the ways. He was curious about every small detail. The way she sat on the launching apron, the wax on the timbers, the multitude of holes in her bottom — some covered with brass screening and some not — their purpose lost in the darkness that met Sam's eyes when he looked into them.

About midships, there was a drinking fountain set away from the ship and between the bents of a Whirley trestle. A man was standing there, looking away from Gallagher and through the trestle to the next way. Sam Gallagher crossed to him, the sound of his steps lost in the clatter and bang of ships building. He touched the man's shoulder.

"Hello, McWhitty."

McWhitty jumped and spun under his hand. The motion carried him away. When he was fully turned, his back was to a piling. His spud wrench was out of his belt and in his hand — a two-foot length of steel and a decent weapon.

"Damn you, Gallagher!" he said.

He was a chunky little man, almost fat. He wore overalls and a leather jacket, and still he had the look of a bookkeeper, a bank clerk, or a shoe salesman in a woman's store. His was a sharp face, pale save for the weather-roughened skin across his cheek-bones.

"Damn you, Gallagher!" he said.

"Easy," said Gallagher. "Easy does it."

The white look was long in leaving McWhitty's round face, the fury stayed on unslackened. He jammed his wrench back in his belt. He pulled his rigger's gloves from his hands; he shoved his tin hat back. His eyes were bloodshot. They looked at Sam, then beyond Sam to the ship, the ways, the trestle, and back to Sam again. His mouth drew down savagely.

"Go on," he said. "Beat it!"

Quietly, Sam said, "What's the rush?"

"Are you crazy?" McWhitty said.

"Not me," Sam answered.

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Deliberately, he stayed on. His face was sober, and the straight look he had for McWhitty was searching, hard. McWhitty turned restlessly.

"I've got enough trouble."

Sam Gallagher caught his shoulder. "You're going to talk a minute."

McWhitty faced him, tight-lipped, silent.

Gallagher said, "I've been looking at the ship."

McWhitty held his silence.

"For pure beauty of line, you can't beat a ship."

McWhitty's eyes turned behind his glasses. He looked at the ship and back at Sam. There was a sudden, explosive thrust to what he said — it was a conviction he had had for some time.

"She's a killer! She's built for murder, and sure as God, she'll die before she ever leaves the ways!"

"You sound positive."

"Positive!" McWhitty cried bitterly.

"All right, why?"

McWhitty put his gloves back on. He tried to leave again and Sam Gallagher caught his arm.

"Why?" Sam repeated.

Harshly, McWhitty said, "What the hell are you here for?"

"To do what I can."

"If they aren't going to blow her to hell you wouldn't be here! For God's sake —"

He jerked his arm free. Gallagher watched him go up the shipway, a small, round man, hurrying. Gallagher found a cigarette and lighted it. His face was wooden, expressionless. Presently, he went back to the walkway. He passed the cruiser, the carrier, and finally reached

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the place where the new shipways were going in.

Jeff Gallagher had been waiting for him. That was in the set of his shoulders when Sam Gallagher came through the stacked timber. There was nothing pleasant in Jeff's lean face, nothing friendly in his eyes.

"Where've you been?" he asked.

Sam Gallagher leaned back against a pile of twelve-by-twelves. He took his time in answering, meeting Jeff's eyes fully, grinning a little with a wry drag to his lips.

"I had myself a shower," he said. "A good, hot shower — and I think, by God, it saved my life. I had a rest along with it." To this he added, after a moment's thought, "And while I was about it, I took a Cook's tour around the yard. Clever, the way they build these ships."

"Yes," said Jeff.

Sam threw his cigarette away.

"That's it. I had myself a shower."

"Where?" said Jeff.

"In a Leaderman's shower."

"Now we get to it." There was no break in the woodenness of Jeff's face. "You're here two days and you start grabbing at things you don't rate. You start bumming around the yard —"

"On my own time," said Sam.

"That makes no difference," said Jeff harshly. "From now on, you stay where you belong or there'll be trouble. And a new man doing your job. Is that clear?"

Sam Gallagher saluted. "Yes, sir."

Jeff half-turned — turned back. It was in his eyes to make something of this, something final. But he decided against it, suddenly, for it was something he hadn't

thought out. And Jeff Gallagher did nothing he hadn't thoroughly planned.

"It better be," he said.

Jill McCann was washing the front window when Sam Gallagher came up the walk. He grinned at her and went into the living room. She followed him there, a bottle of window cleaner in one hand, a cloth in the other, a question for Sam Gallagher bright in her eyes.

"You're late," she said.

He grinned again. "I had a spot of trouble."

"What happened?"

"I'll swap you the story for a drink," Sam said. "After I've changed clothes. First, though, I wish you would call Thane. Ask him out here."

"Here?" she asked.

"That's what I said."

"But, Mr. Gallagher, I think —"

Abruptly, Sam Gallagher turned on her. He had his sweat-shirt over his head and down on his arms. He let it stay on his arms, and he spoke short-temperedly. "The name's Sam. You can skip the 'Mr.' And I'll do the thinking for both of us."

Her small face became still. She looked at him — measured him with grey eyes that tightened a little. After a moment's cool thought, she said, "Your name is Gallagher. Mine is McCann. And I'll do my own thinking, thanks. You're the boss. I'll do what you say, but I'll think what I like."

Sam whistled. "Man, am I married!"

"I'll call Thane." She went toward the kitchen.

"And make me that drink," Sam yelled.

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He went up to the bathroom to shave. He was stripped to the waist and well lathered, when Paul knocked at the open door. He had a highball for Sam.

"Atta, kid," said Sam.

He wiped the lather from his lips and had a drink. Shaving again, he looked at Paul in the mirror. Paul was admiring the width of Sam's shoulders. He met Sam's look, briefly, with troubled eyes. There was more trouble in his face, in the uncomfortable way he held his slim body.

Sam said, "Where's Gretchen?"

"Taking her nap, sir."

"You don't take naps, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Go to school, though?"

"I start Monday."

Sam had another drink. He made a slow thing of washing his razor. Paul's face was still troubled.

Sam said, "What's eating you, son?"

"Eating me?" Paul's dark eyes were wide.

"It's American for 'What's cookin'?" He turned. "You've got something itching you, kid. Out with it — this is the beef department."

Uncomfortably, Paul said, "Mother said to call you Gallagher, after this."

"You tell Mother I'll kick her teeth in."

Paul went out.

Sam ran water in the tub, and Jill came to the door. Her face was flushed with angry impatience.

"What on earth did you tell Paul?"

Sam had another drink. "Let's all get together sometime — it'd save a lot of running back and forth. I told

him to tell you I was going to kick your teeth in."

"Now that was clever!"

"That's me," Sam said. "I'm terrific. I'll keep you in stitches —"

"Sutures," she said.

"Come take a bath with me."

"You wouldn't like that," Jill McCann told him. "I've got termites."

James Thane turned the creases of his pants-legs inward when he sat down and crossed his legs. He was like that — a careful man. Careful with the things he said, with the expressions he allowed on his face. And he was crisp — his voice, the collar of his white shirt, his black tie, his well-brushed grey hair. He sipped his drink and looked at Sam Gallagher.

"Jill is right," he said. "I shouldn't have come here. I won't come again."

Jill made a face at Sam Gallagher.

Sam got up and walked restlessly to the window, then came back and sat down again. His red hair was beginning to curl free of the wet combing he'd given it. There was no amusement in his brown eyes, or the set of his mouth. Only a quiet seriousness.

"Of course," he said. "But you'd come once — I needed that. Today. There's too much I don't know. And there are a few things you don't know."

"We'll take the last first."

Sam said, "McWhitty's cracking up."

Thane looked at his glass. "McWhitty's a good man. He's been in the yard six months, done a tremendous amount of ground work."

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"Fine," said Sam. "But now he's done. Get him out of there. I don't want him around."

Thane shook his head. "He'll stay. We haven't enough men to go 'round. McWhitty can still do a great deal. Later, perhaps, we'll take him away."

"You'll take him away in a basket."

"That is a possibility we all face."

Sam Gallagher made an angry sound.

Thane said, "Now the things you don't know."

"Have you got an hour or two?" Gallagher asked sourly. "Maybe three. The things I don't know reach from here to hell and back. What *do* I know? Damnation! — all I do down there is take a beating."

"You're doing as you're told."

"That's fine! That's great!"

Thane said, "For you, it's remarkable."

"Give me names, man. Details."

"Why the great thirst for knowledge?"

"Didn't you say time was the essence?"

Thane nodded. "Yes," he said, "but doing the job properly is even more important."

"I'm doing no job at all."

"That's for me to judge, Sam."

Sam Gallagher pushed out of his chair and circled the room. Jill McCann looked at her hands. Thane rubbed moisture from the outside of his glass. Sam came back to his drink, finished it, and then went out to the kitchen and made another. When he returned it was the same. Sam finally broke the silence, disgusted and tired.

"What a man won't do to earn a dollar!"

"You throw your weight around," Thane said. "It's an

unfortunate thing. It leads to trouble — quite serious trouble, more often than not.”

“I’ve had a tough day,” Gallagher said.

“In what way?” Thane asked.

“I tangled with Jeff.”

“That was a mistake,” Thane said. “And you may as well realize you haven’t many more to make.”

Sam said, “How many?”

Thane met his eyes. Then he looked away, turning to the window, his finely boned face cool and thoughtful. He let Sam Gallagher wait, left Sam’s blunt question for Sam to think about.

“I’m sorry,” Sam said at last.

Thane said, “Max Lessing is the key man in this, as nearly as we can discover.”

“But he’s Seaboard’s General Manager!”

“We’re well aware of that,” said Thane.

Sam Gallagher whistled. “Good Lord,” he said harshly. “They went clear to the top this time.” He paused. Then, “That’s why I’m on Jeff’s crew, isn’t it? I’d wondered about that — wondered why you thought one man could do any good in a yard that works fifty thousand.”

“Yes,” said Thane, “that’s the reason. We put you as close to the source of trouble as possible. We know the names of two others, Sam. One is Joseph Simms, a carpenter; the other is John Parrish, a shipwright.”

Gallagher looked meaningfully at Jill.

“There’s our friend,” he said.

Thane said, “What’s this?”

“Parrish followed me home,” said Sam.

“Probably a routine check,” Thane said. “You’re not a pilebuck, and you’re a little higher on the social scale

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than the usual new hand. Most of them, we've found, are ex-carpenters, ex-loggers, and the like. The opposition would be curious about you, naturally. And their operatives are very thorough."

"We've learned that," said Jill.

Sam closed the business of Parrish with a brush of his hand. "When's *der tag*?" he asked. "And what've these monkeys got in mind?"

"I wish we knew," said Thane quietly.

Sam said, "So that's the squeeze?"

"We know a little," said Thane, "and we can guess. In about a month there'll be four naval vessels ready for launching. Whatever happens will happen just before the scheduled launching of those ships."

"Why?"

"Because these men are intelligent." There was endless patience in Thane's face. "If you were hunting birds you'd wait till the roost was full before you shot. You wouldn't let four of the fattest birds fly away — not if you could help it."

"I don't shoot sitting birds," said Sam.

Jill said, "They do — damn them!"

"In about a month then —"

"Or something less," said Thane. "We're not sure just what their plan is. Certainly, it involves the destruction of the ships — the carriers, the cruisers, the mine-layers, and whatever else they can get. My guess is that they will try for the whole yard — everything built or building. That would mean a huge loss of material we would have difficulty replacing. Not to mention the loss of time. The yard will probably have to be rebuilt if they succeed."

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"They'd save the subs some work," said Sam.

Thane nodded gravely. "Yes, but the emphasis is on morale. They believe the men in the yards will stop trying for records when they see the ships they've built destroyed before they ever leave the ways." He paused. "If they live to see it."

"McWhitty said something about blowing the Ozark — she's ready for launching."

Thane frowned. "Perhaps you're right about Mac."

Sam Gallagher said, "I know I am."

Thane stood up. "I've given you names and details. In view of what's happened, I'd suggest you try to contact Parrish and see what you can learn. Don't try to do anything about the others. I mean that, Sam."

"Not even to protect myself?"

"Your job," Thane said quietly, "is to gain the confidence of the men and your employers. Underline that. You're a pilebuck. Be one. Let nothing, and I mean nothing, make you conspicuous. Spend the next two weeks becoming a pilebuck. Then, perhaps, you'll be of some use to us."

Sam chuckled. "A pilebuck in two weeks!"

"Is that amusing?"

Sam said, "I wish you could meet Kelly."

"I may," said Thane. "One day soon."

He left them then, and after he'd gone the house seemed huge, empty. Sam Gallagher scowled at his glass.

"This Kelly?" Jill said. "Who is he?"

"He's a pilebuck. One of the old-timers."

"That doesn't tell me much," Jill said.

"I guess it doesn't," Sam admitted. Then, "He's Irish, McCann. Tough, construction-stiff Irish, and built like

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a little brick out-house. He's been around a long time; he's forty-five or fifty. And he still has more bounce, more stamina, more honest-to-God know how than a dozen like me. He's quite a guy, this Kelly."

"A friend of yours?" Jill asked.

"Hardly." The wry grin touched Sam's mouth. "He wants to nail my hide to the tool-shack wall. He has a huge dislike for all green hands, and for Sam Gallagher in particular. If I was smart, I'd spend my spare time in a gym finding out what makes a left hook click."

"Well? Why don't you?"

His grin widened. "I'm lazy, McCann."

"Are there many like Kelly in the yard?"

"I haven't checked up," he said. "Why?"

"I just wondered." She was frowning now. "If there are a lot like him — if they resent the influx of new and inexperienced men — doesn't it make for friction?"

"That's one word for it," he said.

"And what about production?"

"You've got me," he said. "That's a big yard, Jill. Damned big. And I've been working there just two shifts."

"You must have some idea," she persisted.

"Nope," he said. "I'm as empty as a bass drum. I haven't a very clear picture of what they're trying to do, or how they're going at it. I did wander around the yard today. Some of the things I saw made me proud; some made me a little sick."

Quietly, she said, "Go on, Sam."

"Take the ships," he said. "They're big and fine — the finest in the world, I hope — and enough to make any man push out his chest. And there's the way they throw

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the yard together. Yesterday we walked a quarter of a mile through mud and gravel to get to the tool shack. That was yesterday. That part of the yard is paved now. Black-topped. And the machinery they used has already been moved away."

"I'd call that production," she said.

"And know-how."

"What about the rest of the picture?"

"That's not so pretty," he said soberly. "I saw whole crews of men hiding out. Not just one or two men, but complete crews. I saw men asleep — at the wheel of a truck, in an out-of-the-way corner, or down under one of the ships. I heard a couple of riggers talking about a crap game that had been running all day in one of the tool rooms. They were laughing about it, McCann. They thought it was funny."

"Funny!" Her hands tightened. "Good Lord!"

He said, "Now you're angry, McCann."

"Why wouldn't I be? Those men are no better —"

"Than Fifth Columnists," he said, "or sentries who sleep at their posts. I know, McCann. I felt the same way. I wanted to pick up a chunk of flat bar steel and remind them there was a war on. But you can't do that. And words are no good. Machine guns and dive bombers and firing squads and starvation mean nothing when they're half the world away."

"They're not half the world away!" Jill cried. "The war's not! It's right at the door."

Sam shook his head. "Not to them."

"How can they be so blind?"

"Think back," he said, "and you'll come up with the answer to that. The war didn't mean much to you until

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you saw a part of it yourself. After you saw the first bomb fall you knew it was real.

"The men in the yard feel the same way. The war's big and important — and quite distant. It hasn't touched them yet. There's plenty of work and plenty of money. The stores are still full of food. A man can buy almost anything he wants, except tires and gas. A man gets clipped — and clipped is the word they use — for War Bonds and the Victory Tax, but there's still plenty left. From what I've heard, the average working man lumps War Bonds, Union Dues, and the Hospital Fund under the heading of necessary evils."

"All right," Jill said. "Suppose it is that way? What about the men who run the shipyards? Can't they see what's going on? Can't they —"

"Now you come to it," said Sam. "Good girl!"

Jill McCann frowned. "What do you mean?"

"The men who are building the yard and the ships know what they're doing — make no mistake about that." Sam Gallagher leaned forward, chin propped in his cupped hand. "A shipyard doesn't spring out of a swamp over night unless the men behind it know exactly what goes on. But they're sitting in one place; we're in another. It's hard for us — for me, at least — to see what they're up against, what problems they face."

"Yes?" said Jill.

"I'm a simple sort of cluck," he told her. "I like to break things down into simple patterns — the kind of patterns I can see clearly. All right. Call the yard a machine for the building of ships. It's that, in a large sense. The material's poured in one end and the ships come out the other. See what I mean? It's quite a job to build

a machine like that. In fact, it's a hell of a job when you remember the machine must turn out ships all the time it's under construction."

"That makes sense," Jill said.

"So now we've got a machine," he said, "and we'll call it Betsy, just to make it easy." He grinned at her. "Betsy's quite a gadget and it takes a lot of cogs and gears and pistons to make her function smoothly. That's the trouble now, or part of it. Betsy's not finished yet. She stutters and misses and sometimes she bogs down altogether." He spread his hands. "But we'd be silly to damn her for that — as silly as if we decided an engine was junk before it had ever been put on the block and tested."

"But this loafing —" Jill began.

"The workmen are Betsy's cogs," he said. "There are always a lot of small parts kicking around while a machine is being built. The men who build machines — tool designers, or whatever they're called — don't wait until they need parts before they order them. They have parts piled up where they'll be handy. Okay. That may be the reason I've seen men standing around. Maybe Betsy was being changed a bit and there was nothing for them to do at that particular time. Or perhaps the tool designers wanted the parts there when they needed them and ordered ahead of time." He paused, frowning now. "Or this may be the old cost-plus racket again. Frankly, I couldn't even make a guess. We'll have to wait and see."

Jill sighed. "I guess we will."

"I'll keep you informed," he said.

The rain had stopped, when Sam Gallagher went to work early Thursday morning, but low-swung, grey

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clouds promised more of it soon. He put on his overalls in the tool shack. From the steps he could see the time-office windows, the light there. He looked that way, thinking of Lea Damaron's "You're married, Sam. You've got two children. How — how nice —" Gallagher's mouth turned bitter; he went down where the piledrivers were working.

There were two drivers, side by side. Floodlights glared on them, showing the fine tracery of the cables, the complete ugliness of the timbers, the moving shadows of the men who made them go. As Gallagher watched, a cable leaped taut and the long bulk of a piling swooped up out of the ground darkness, climbing skyward until it smashed against the headblock. The loftsmen caught it expertly with his line, drew it into the leads. His strident yell of "*Hammer!*" brought a huge weight crashing down on the pilehead. Someone else yelled, "*Hit 'er!*" and the weight exploded with a violent belching of steam and noise. The booming slam of the hammer — *bump, stomp — bump, stomp —* sent the piling down. They drove that piling. The driver swung across greased caps as the hammer lifted, and another piling roared up out of the dark and into the loftsmen's waiting noose. Here was the work — no doubt of it. Here the slugging, savage pace was set.

The drivers were skid-rigs — Ikey had told Sam that. The sled-like runners which carried the weight were gun'ales. The parallel guides which held the piling under the hammer were leads — Kelly called them ginns. The truss which held the leads erect was the A-frame. The steam hoist was the pot. Two weeks to become a pile-buck. Sam Gallagher had a laugh at Thane —

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But to learn anything you had to start at the beginning; the pile-yard seemed the best bet. Gallagher went toward it, climbing the dark sand dunes on the port side of the way. A caterpillar tractor came roaring down, dragging piling to the drivers. Gallagher watched it go by, then took the deep ruts to the top of the hill.

Lights clustered on three sides turned the pile-yard into day. There were men everywhere — some with axes sniping piling, others with cross-cut saws, fresh-heading, others peeling. A car load of piling lay on the railroad siding. They looked like telephone poles heaped there. Gallagher guessed them to be eighty-foot sticks — fourteen inches or better at the butt, ten at the top, weighing more than a ton apiece. Three men worked there, two in the shadow on the ground, one in the bright light on top of the car.

Sam Gallagher was watching when the man on top of the car lifted his arms in a queer, jerking movement. It looked as if he'd lost his balance, which was odd, for he was standing in the center of the load and the car was still. Yet he had — his back bent, his feet shuffled. He pin-wheeled his hands as a man does when he's about to fall backward. He managed an awkward turn, then jumped toward the center stake on the far side of the car.

Gallagher might have yelled, but if he did the sound was lost in the white flash of panic that burst in his mind. He was moveless for one short breath, as helpless as a wooden doll. He saw the thing happen; saw it blend into one sweeping moment of destruction. Later, he would be able to remember each phase, each man and the way death came to him. But now it was all one — a furious, crashing chord, struck and held endlessly.

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A cry broke from the shadow beneath the load. Gallagher saw swift movement there — men running, scattering. He heard a deep rumble from the load itself. In the next instant the load surged with sudden, terrible life. A stake broke with a crack like a rifle shot. Another spun away, end over end. A piling lifted its butt, rearing angrily. The top of another kicked off the car, plowed into the ground and broke off short. The whole vast mass of the load was moving then, rolling, thundering to the ground.

A man came from the shadow under the load — was blasted from the shadow, headlong, as though he'd been hit by a giant fist. His legs couldn't keep pace. He bent forward, farther and farther. He fell, finally, on his chest and outstretched hands. Desperately, he came erect, dragging himself to his knees, his feet. And as he straightened his legs buckled and he went down again. He tried to crawl, but even that was too much. He collapsed, and the rolling piling caught him there.

The second man who'd been on the ground never appeared. He was somewhere under the load, toward the far end of the car. And he was screaming —

The man on top of the load was still on top, still running. He was no nearer the center stake and safety than he'd ever been. Gallagher watched him jump to a piling; saw that piling spin beneath his flying feet, lift high, then drop into the churning load. The man jumped hard for another. It was a long jump that brought him to his knees. Awkwardly, he scrambled there, riding the piling with fast-moving hands and knees. His hat bounced off, lived a second, and disappeared. The load changed; the man threw himself again. This time he fell on his side.

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Twisting, he managed to drag himself a short way on his belly. Suddenly, he came erect — was pushed erect. His legs were down between the rolling piling to his knees. He fought the piling with his fists, pounding them for one brief second, and then gave it up. He flung his hands up. His head went back. And he dropped into the surging mass as a man drops into water.

Sam Gallagher ran.

Others were running, too. Before Gallagher reached the car, a dozen men were there. They found the man who'd screamed at the end of the car, trapped there, with a pile-butt across his legs. He wasn't screaming now. He lay face down; blood ran from his mouth to the sand. They cut the piling that held him, and the men who ran the saw — big men with white, tortured faces — would never cut a piling that fast again.

Two men brought peevees. The pileyard foreman got to them before they touched a hook to wood. He knocked one down with a swinging fist, sent the other staggering back. He didn't tell them why — didn't tell them that to roll the piling would rob the men trapped under them of the last shred of hope. Thickset, thick-shouldered, gray, he ranged back and forth across the heap, and no man wanted to test the rage that stood in the thick cords of his neck. That rang in his steady cursing. It was an eternity before the crane came to lift the piling, another before the crushed and lifeless bodies were finally pulled free.

"How did it happen?"

The question was on a hundred pairs of lips; it brought a hundred answers. But only one answer mattered; only one would go down in the records. The Safety Inspector

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was a round little man with glasses, a tin hat, and a rabbit-like way of pointing his nose. He gave his answer patly:

"They cut the end stakes first."

"That's a Goddamned lie!"

The pile-yard foreman yelled that, his face no more than an inch from the Safety Inspector's startled face, his huge fist just scraping the Inspector's chin. His men were dead; their deaths were his responsibility. That they had died was enough — to accuse them of stupidity or carelessness was the last straw. The foreman's voice was cluttered with his rage, his torment, his memory of the way his men had died.

"That crew unloaded twenty cars!" he choked. "Before they tackled the first car, I told 'em how. 'Cut the center stake first,' I says. 'Cut the end stakes second, and then go 'round back and cut the wire.' They done it like that — I swear to Christ they did. So why would they do it right twenty times, then all of a sudden do it wrong?"

The Inspector, "I'm asking you?"

Hoarsely, the foreman said, "You dirty —"

He reached for the Inspector with big, knotted hands, and all the rage a man could ever feel was in the bulk of his shoulders, his bloodshot eyes, the terrible shape of his mouth. He never got to the Inspector. A slim, hard arm came between them suddenly. It was Jeff Gallagher, brown-faced, sober. He caught the foreman's shirt-front in one hand, caught the foreman's chin with the other. And he shoved the foreman's chin up and back. The foreman's rage came down on Jeff. His fist crashed sledge-like across Jeff's forehead and into his chest. Jeff took the blow and let it pass.

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"Eb!" Jeff snapped. "Stop it, man!"

And the foreman broke. His face greyed and aged in the space of a moment. The anger went out of his shoulders. His big hands lost their fists. He reached for Jeff Gallagher clumsily; shook him with a gentle roughness. There were words in the man, but he could not speak. His eyes and his fumbling hands spoke for him, telling of the great weight that had come upon his shoulders. He turned and pushed his way through silent men. He went toward the office — toward whatever they do to a foreman who lets his men get killed.

And Sam Gallagher, who'd watched all this, found that he'd bitten his lips until the dull taste of blood was in his mouth.

Jeff Gallagher said, "You men get back to work."

He turned to the Inspector. "I know what happened. Get a man down here to guard this car. You'll want a full investigation."

Fussily, the Inspector said, "See here —"

Jeff moved close to him. He spoke in a clipped and quiet voice, and no one but Sam Gallagher was near enough to hear the words.

"Someone," Jeff said, "cut the wire."

The Inspector's breath wheezed out.

"The hell you say —!"

Sam Gallagher looked toward the car. He saw the wire for the first time. Heavy wire. Tied between each pair of stakes, through each layer of piling, and across the top of the load, it had done most of the work of holding the load on the car. That wire cut meant a load balanced on the car, held there by no more than a wish and a promise.

Sam Gallagher turned and walked away.

CHAPTER THREE

A FIRE burned at the water end of the new shipway. Sam Gallagher stopped there, turned his back to the flames and waited.

The men came from the pile-yard in groups, some talking, some quiet and thoughtful. Kelly was talking. Talking to a small, sober Ikey, talking hard and fast, with anger in the sharp gestures of his big hands, in the stiff set of his head. He'd lost his hat. His shirt was open to the waist. He'd rolled his right sleeve above the elbow, but the bloodstain there was anything but hidden.

"— cut the end stakes first!"

Ikey shook his head.

"Don't seem like a man could be that dumb!"

Kelly swore. "It wasn't Charlie that done it, an' it wasn't Webb. Them two could've unloaded cars blind drunk. It was that punk kid they had workin' with 'em! God! I tell you, Ikey, you're askin' for it to let one of 'em stay on the job!"

They were close to Sam Gallagher now. Kelly did not lower his voice. He included Sam Gallagher in what he said, pointed it at Gallagher with a blunt thrust of his chin.

"We got to run 'em off the job!"

Sam Gallagher said nothing.

It was Tom Brownell who answered Kelly. Brownie. He turned his head a little, fire shadows flickering on his broad face. There was a slow bite in his voice, a bluntness that matched Kelly's.

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"Who would do the work?"

"We done it before!" Kelly snapped.

"A tenth this much. You know that — you should know it. There's not enough men to go 'round. We've got to break in new men, or quit. It means trouble. Sure. It means some of us get killed." He moved his big shoulders. "Do you worry about your life in times like these?"

Kelly set his jaw. "I'm damned if —"

And Jeff Gallagher strode out of the darkness to face them with hard authority in his eyes.

"Are you men going to work?" he asked.

Kelly was silent. Brownie smoked unperturbedly. Ikey, feeling it was up to him, tried to sound casual.

"What's the contract, Jeff?"

He looked startled, for his voice had come out high and girlishly shrill.

Jeff grinned. "Well, sweetheart!"

Ikey reddened. "Aw, go to hell!"

The men had a laugh at Ikey, a relieved laugh, and the tautness of the moment was gone. Jeff turned to Kelly.

"We're sinking caps," he said. "Use the lengths you've been using — a twenty-six, a forty, a thirty-two. Reverse it on the next bent to get a staggered joint."

"Clarence going to sink 'em?"

"That's right," said Jeff.

Clarence was the operator of the Woodland, and the Woodland was the floating crane which swung, barge-like, on the shadowed river just off-shore. Its first purpose was dredging, a clam-shell bucket dangled from its long boom. Sam Gallagher wondered how the Woodland could help in what they had to do.

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"Ikey," Jeff said, "cut pieces of straight-edge for stakes. Brownie, you and Bevins and Calaban get some caps into the water. Remember the lengths. You'd better talk to Clarence, Kelly. Sam, you rustle the air-line. You'll need a manifold, two short lengths of hose, an air drill and a drift hammer. Make the drill a thirteen-sixteenths —"

"Consider it done," said Sam.

"And bring a load of drift pins with the hand you ain't usin'."

Sam Gallagher was a half hour and three trips getting the tools together. By that time, Clarence had brought the Woodland close in-shore. The bucket was hanging above the first under-water bent. They were ready to go to work.

On land, the business of capping was fairly simple. The piling were driven in long rows and cut off at a given height. The caps — timbers that measured twelve by fourteen inches — were laid across the top of the piling and were fastened to the piling with steel drift pins. Sam Gallagher had seen that done. But this capping under water was something new.

The caps were buoyant, for one thing. You couldn't see the tops of the piling, for another. You had to drill the holes for the drift pins under water and drive them under water. And somehow, with all of this, you had to keep from freezing to death —

Ikey was standing chest-deep in water, trying to drive one of the stakes he'd cut. He was too short to do a job of it. Sam pushed out to help him. The water kicked him in the groin as it always did, and he set his teeth against it. Ikey gave him a white grin.

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"My old lady," he chattered, "says she's goin' to leave me if I don't quit workin' this cold water. She claims I ain't no good to her."

"No wonder!" Sam gasped.

He took the top-maul from Ikey.

When he'd driven the stake, Ikey told him how the work would go: "This stake is right against the piling on the bottom, see? We drive another stake on the other side of the same pile. We do likewise over there where the other end of the cap's goin' to be. Then we float the cap between the stakes. She's layin' right above the pilin', ain't she? An' when Clarence sets his bucket on her, she can't go no place but smack where we want 'er."

"Easy enough."

"Like hell," said Ikey, and jerked a thumb at the Woodland. "That wore-out ol' bitch is pure junk. You can't boom 'er up, or boom 'er down. She swings on her spuds. Her frictions grab. Her brakes are jerky. Her boom-swing's like my ol' lady rollin' in bed — first one side, then the other. She ain't fit for nuthin'!"

Sam Gallagher said, "Sounds good."

Bevins shoved a twenty-six-foot cap across the water. Sam Gallagher and Ikey caught it and steered it between the stakes. Calaban and Brownie stopped it between the stakes at their end. Ikey said, "Hold the roll, chum," and Sam steadied the cap. Ikey swung his soaked leg across the cap, straddled it. He caught the two stakes and pinched them in against the sides of the cap.

"We got our end," he yelled.

"Yah," said Calaban. "Let's send 'er down!"

And it was Kelly's job to get the clam-shell bucket

directly above the cap. He had a time of it. The Woodland was a cranky rig. There was too much noise in the yard for a yell to reach Clarence, perched high in the control cab. Kelly used hand signals. These, Sam found, were an art in themselves.

The thumb was the boom. Kelly's thumb up meant he wanted the boom up; to the right or left, he wanted the boom swung right or left; down, he wanted the boom down. The fingers were the bucket. Fingers up meant pick the bucket up; down meant lower it.

Kelly lowered the bucket. He stopped it ten feet above the cap. "How does she look?" he asked Bevins. Bevins, at the end of the cap, lined it up. The bucket was too far off-shore. "Boom 'er down," he said.

Kelly turned his thumb down.

Sam Gallagher watched Clarence pull levers. The boom wobbled a little, but didn't come down. Clarence pulled more levers. A bell jangled inside the Woodland. Steam panted out the exhaust. Still the boom was motionless. Kelly's arm got tired. He dropped it.

"Boom 'er down!" he roared.

Clarence's faint yell bristled: "What the hell you think I'm doin'?"

Finally, the boom came down — too far. Kelly boomed it up, almost as much of a job, then sent it a little to the right. He lowered the bucket. "Comin' down!" he warned the men. Under the two tons of weight, the cap sank like a rock.

"Gallagher," Kelly yelled, "where's the drill?"

Sam Gallagher floundered ashore and got the drill. Kelly drilled a hole through the cap into each of the piling. In water to his chin, Gallagher fumbled for the

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holes Kelly had drilled. He set a drift pin in each. Calaban drove the pins with the drift hammer. And the cap was set.

They were an hour finishing the bent. Glumly, Kelly said, "Dog 'er, boys!" and they all went up to the fire. Ikey dug into his spare sweat-shirt and came up with a bottle. "That Jeff!" he yelped happily. "He's a foreman!" And Sam was faintly proud. It was Jeff who bought the bottles. It took a good man to know when the rules should be broken.

They had a drink around. Their lips were blue with cold and the bottle clicked against their teeth.

"Great God!" Bevins said.

Kelly was silent. The water had washed the blood from his sleeve, but the memory of it was still in the man, a mood as dark as the clouds which filled the winter sky. He scowled at Sam Gallagher.

Toward the end of the shift, they sunk a cap that wouldn't rest squarely on the piling. It had a sharp cant. When Gallagher stepped on it, the thing wobbled.

"There's sand under it," Kelly said.

Gallagher shook his head. "It's a high piling."

Kelly set his teeth. "It's sand. Clean it out!"

He picked up the bucket a little. The cap came up. The others steadied it, and Gallagher got down in the water and ran his hand over the top of each piling.

"No sand," he said.

"Then she'll be okay," Kelly said.

He lowered the bucket. Still the cap was canted; still it wobbled. Kelly let the bucket down until the cables were slack. He got up on the cab and rocked it with his feet.

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"There's a hump of sand between the piling."

"Don't take my word for it," Gallagher said.

Kelly didn't. He got down in the water and felt along the bottom of the cap. Gallagher and the others waited, arms held out of the water, shivering. Kelly went the length of the cap, then stood back, a rough, black scowl on his face.

"What, no sand?" Gallagher said.

And Kelly growled, "Be smart, bud!"

He tested the cap again.

"A stubborn cuss," Sam said.

"He's stallin'," Ikey said. "He's gonna stall till the next shift comes on, an' let them worry about it."

Kelly's neck was thick and red. He ignored Ikey and Gallagher. He rocked the cap savagely.

Ikey said, "Next he's gonna bite it."

Gallagher laughed. So did the others. And now, besides being wrong — which was all Kelly could stand — Kelly was ridiculous. His face was swollen and black with anger. Gallagher said, "I'll get a saw," and went after it, thinking that never had there been another man as stubborn as Kelly.

Kelly was gone when Sam returned. "Coolin' off," Ikey said. They got the cap out of the way. They found that someone, miserable with cold, had let his saw run, that one piling was an inch and a half high. Bevins and Sam re-cut it. They brought the cap into position again.

And Kelly came back. He'd had a drink, a big one, out of Ikey's bottle. The drink and the walk had quieted him; but not, Sam decided, to a place where he could be trusted with children. His red hair was stiff; his ears pink. There was a tough set to his jaw. He wanted no

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wisecracks. No trouble. Above all, he wanted nothing to do with Sam Gallagher.

He took over the business of the bucket; he brought it down on the cap, while the others steadied it. Bevins said, "She's a whisker off-shore." That meant the bucket was off-shore and would drag the cap when it came down. To center it, Kelly would have to boom down.

"We can hold 'er," he said.

He brought the bucket down. The cap sank. The men shoved against it. Ikey pinched his stakes together with all he had. But it wasn't enough. The drag pulled the stakes apart. The cap swung on the edge of the piling, rolled.

"Again," Kelly said. "This time — give!"

They tried again with the same result.

"Once more!" Kelly roared.

Ikey was angry now; the cords of his small arms stood out like wire. Gallagher shoved. Brownie left Bevins and came to help. The three of them — Ikey, Sam, and Brownie — pushed, and Brownie's big shoulders made a surprising difference. The cap stayed on the piling. Gallagher checked the bottom.

"Half on," he said.

Kelly swore. He plowed through the water, climbed on the cap behind Ikey. There, reaching over Ikey's shoulder, he could help with the stakes. But when he tried to signal Clarence in the control cab, he found the boom in the way.

"Gallagher," he said, "pick 'er up a hair an' we'll move her over."

"Right," said Sam.

And it occurred to him that this was the first time

he'd ever signaled an operator. But he knew how — he'd watched Kelly often enough. The thumb was the boom; the fingers were the bucket. Kelly wanted the bucket lifted. Nothing to it. That meant lift the fingers.

"Easy, mind!" Kelly warned.

Gallagher lifted the fingers of one hand.

The bucket came up. But not just a hair — and not easily. It came up smoothly and fast. The cap followed, dragging off-shore. Kelly and Ikey tried desperately to hold it with the stakes. Kelly yelled. Gallagher, startled, forgot to signal Clarence to stop. Clarence was a good operator. He did exactly as he was told; he kept on doing it until he was told to stop. He lifted the bucket clear of the water. The cap popped to the surface. Ikey, straddling the cap, managed to stay on. Kelly had no chance at all. He went into the water, deep water, arms waving, bellowing like a mad bull to the very last.

Kelly's boots broke water, thrashed violently, and disappeared. Then his head came up. His red hair was plastered down over his eyes. He'd been yelling when he went in; he'd shipped a cargo of water. He got rid of that. But he didn't wipe the hair out of his eyes; he looked through it at Sam Gallagher.

Bevins was making a lot of racket. He'd whoop, then there'd be a long moment while his breath ran out, and then he'd whoop again. He had trouble standing up. He lurched through the water to the way deck, still whooping. Brownie laughed. Ikey got off the cap with an uncertain grin.

None of this bothered Kelly. He had room in his head for Gallagher and nothing else. He spat again, shoved

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the floating cap aside and plowed ashore. With Sam, it was like the day the nailing gun had come apart. He'd done something wrong. Stupidly wrong. And he had an apology ready, an honest-to-God apology.

Kelly had something else in mind. He stopped a foot or two from Gallagher, water running down his red face. He put his hands on his hips and had another look at this Joe McGee, this Sunday pilebuck.

"You son-of-a-bitch!" he said.

He swung from his heels. His fist banged Gallagher on the side of the head. A white blaze of light burst across Gallagher's eyes, and then he was down on the flat of his back, with the water surface shimmering a foot above his face. Water stung his nostrils, choked him. He came up blindly, bent over and twisted with coughing. Kelly hit him again. Gallagher was driven back. His heels caught and he sat down in water to his chest.

Gallagher's ears were ringing. His world spun, and for a moment nothing made sense. There was Kelly, waist-deep in water, waiting. There was Calaban's voice, saying distantly, "Let him alone, Kelly! That's enough!" There was Ikey's happy, "Yah, Gallagher! Kill the dirty Irish bum!" And Bevins', "I'll murder the first guy that tries to break it up —"

But mostly there was Kelly.

Gallagher buried his face in the water, let the coldness sting the fog away. He got his feet under him then, and went for Kelly.

Kelly had both fists cocked. He fired them as Gallagher came in, left and right. Gallagher let one blow skid off the top of his head, stepped inside the other. He drove

a right into Kelly's belly, a good hard right. There was plenty of smoke behind it, plenty of shoulder. And it was like hitting a board fence.

Tough — Sam thought.

Kelly was no Jim Corbett, no Fancy Dan. He fought off his heels, facing you squarely. He used his fists like they were lead weights on the end of lengths of hawser, swinging hooks and hay-makers. His come-to-Jesus punch slammed down on you out of the sky like a top-maul or a single-jack. About half the wham was lost in his awkward way of punching, but half what Kelly had was plenty. He got his fists going and walked them into you the way you'd walk a circular saw into timber. You couldn't get close enough to hit him without getting hit. And when Kelly hung one on you, you rattled.

For himself, Gallagher liked a little style. He liked his left out and reaching, his chin down behind his shoulder. He liked to move, up on the balls of his feet, where he could fade with a punch, or come in hard when the gate was open. And a fine lot of moving he could do here, rump-deep in water, his feet buried in mud and sand.

Kelly fired his left hook, then his right. It didn't matter that Gallagher eased them by, that Gallagher stabbed him twice with his left. Kelly had his way of fighting; you could have yours. The fight was the thing. Kelly liked it the way he liked his liquor, straight out of the bottle, and no frills. This simplified things for Gallagher; he knew just how long the fight would last.

Before long, his right hand would fall off his wrist. He'd broken a knuckle, the familiar sting of it burned his forearm. The shoulder Kelly hammered with his right

was about to fold up like a paper bag. Nothing he did seemed to bother Kelly. Too much fat around the middle, Gallagher thought in bleak disgust. Too many armchairs, too much good food —

Kelly let go the left and right. And Gallagher decided not to work on Kelly's chin. It was like trying to open a safe with a firecracker. He slashed Kelly's nose with a hook that brought blood. He drove his right hand up under Kelly's wishbone. Kelly's mouth jerked open; his eyes turned a little glassy. Gallagher felt good about that, and then Kelly's Sunday punch came down on him.

Gallagher almost grinned. This was easy. Just step back, bend a little, and Kelly would hit the ground with his fist. But Gallagher's feet were anchored in mud; his bending only opened the way. The blow caught him squarely. He was falling when Kelly's left came around in the familiar hook. The next thing he knew he was flat on the bottom again, with water over his face again, and all the bells in the world ringing in his head.

When he came up, he was facing away from Kelly, facing the shipways and the yard, and what he saw there hit him almost as hard as Kelly had.

The ways seemed black with men. They hung in the scaffolding about the ships; they'd climbed into the braces of the Whirley trestle, even into the webbed framework of the Whirley itself. They were roaring and waving.

Kelly's last punch was still with Gallagher. He had trouble standing up, trouble seeing. There were ten alarm clocks in his head, all ringing. There were sky-rockets back of his eyes. A fight with Kelly was like a cheap drunk. Gallagher was groggy. He knew this fight,

the men watching, meant something — something damned important — but his mind wouldn't hold still long enough to think why. Suddenly, panic had Sam Gallagher. He wanted to get out of there — a hole to hide in, a board to crawl under. He wanted to run.

"Well?" Kelly growled. "Well, McGee?"

Sam Gallagher staggered to the water's edge. He pushed through the crowd and climbed the hill to the tool-shack. There was a coil of new rope in one corner. Sam Gallagher collapsed there, wrapping his misery around him like a dirty coat.

Jeff Gallagher found him there, an hour later.

"So you're hiding out," he said.

Sam Gallagher looked at him without lifting his head. Jeff's face was tough and hard and unpleasant. There was disgust in the lines of his mouth, in his eyes. But all of it was controlled. A nice guy, Jeff. Always right — right as often as you were wrong, and sometimes you got damned tired of it.

"Call it hiding," said Sam.

"I saw that mess. You quit."

"Yes," said Sam, "that I did."

"You were doing fine, and you dogged it."

Sam Gallagher sighed. He thought of sitting up, but the effort was too much. His ear hurt. He touched it and found it swollen out of shape. A tin ear. In another half hour he wouldn't be able to see out of his left eye. His left shoulder was one huge ache. He couldn't move the fingers of his right hand — that broken knuckle. He sighed again.

"Do I get canned?"

"No."

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11

Jeff looked toward the new shipway. He was waiting for someone, spending the time talking to Sam.

"We don't fire a man for fighting," he said. "Even if we did, I wouldn't fire you."

"My brother —"

"You're wrong. There's not a man on the job I'd like better to can. I mean that, Sam. But there was something big in that scrap. Bigger a hell of a lot than you or Kelly. It would've helped if you'd cleaned him."

"But I didn't."

"That," said Jeff, "is understatement."

He saw the man he wanted then; he called him over. It was Kelly. Sam didn't see Kelly, for Jeff took him around to the side of the shack. The steam wasn't out of Kelly yet. His voice was rough and belligerent; it came through the thin walls of the shack.

"— up easy, I told him," Kelly was saying. "The dumb farmer holds up one hand, 'stead of two. So then Clarence puts me an' Ikey in the river."

Softly, Jeff said, "Were you hurt?"

"It would've been the same a hundred feet up."

"So you clipped him."

"Damn' right! We got so many Joe McGees on the job, a man's takin' his life in his hands to come to work. I'm gonna change that. I'm gonna run 'em off!"

"No!" Jeff's voice turned rough. "When I hire a man, he stays hired till I fire him. You're not going to run any man off my job."

"Then get some pilebucks!"

"God!" Jeff said. "Is there anything dumber than a red-headed Mick? Listen. I called the hall this morning. Max wants to start a crew on the dock. Fifty men.

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I asked George for fifty. Pilebucks. 'Give me three days,' he says, 'and I'll get you fifty. But not pilebucks. Permit men —'” Jeff laughed. “You'll be busy running fifty men off the job.”

“I can quit!”

“There's a war on,” said Jeff. “Remember? We need everybody, anybody. Men like Sam, shoe salesmen, car salesmen, clerks — anything. We have to train them. That's the old-head's job. Your job. You're going to take half these men in the morning — at foreman's pay — and you're going to make pilebucks out of them!”

“I'm gonna quit!” Kelly yelled.

“Try it,” Jeff told him quietly. “Head for the time-office — take one step that way!”

“You gonna stop me?”

“That's the idea.”

There was silence for a time, then Kelly jeered, “Well, now! Ain't you Gallagher boys tough!”

“You think I'm not?”

“Sam was a push.”

“This is Jeff talking.”

“You look the same to me.”

Soft laughter touched Jeff's voice. “Kelly, boy, you're hooked! And here's the way it goes: If I take you, you'll work that crew tomorrow. If I don't, you can quit.”

Kelly said, “I was gonna quit anyway.”

Inside the shack, Sam Gallagher pulled himself erect. Here was a show he couldn't miss, wouldn't miss if he had to crawl to see it. Kelly and Jeff were heading for a brush-grown corner of the yard where a new dry dock would soon be built. Sam trailed them, and on the way there was time to think of Jeff.

PILEBUCK

II

A smooth citizen, that boy. The green men were part of his job, and a problem of proportions. Let Kelly ride them, or quit, and he'd have all the old-heads doing the same thing. And talking wouldn't change Kelly. You had to maneuver him into a position he could not defend. You had to tie strings on him. Jeff had done that the only way he could. He had Kelly tied up like a Christmas package. All that was left, now, was the beating.

A job, Sam thought, for a squad of Marines —

They were hard at it, when Sam caught up. They had found an open space in the brush — smooth sand underfoot and no one to interfere. Kelly had the weight, twenty pounds of it. Jeff had the reach. Jeff's was a raw-boned strength, lean and nail-hard. This was a task to him, and he'd learned you can't make a task pay with half-doing. He went after Kelly soberly, a full driving strength in every blow. To Kelly it was another fight, and better than most, for here was a lad with a kick in either hand.

Kelly's eye was black, his nose swollen — Sam's work, and Jeff left them strictly alone. He had Kelly's chin and Kelly's middle. He laced Kelly's chin with a long left hand, and when Kelly got too close with his whistling hooks, Jeff went inside to bury his hands in Kelly's stomach.

Twice, Kelly brought that Sunday punch down to flatten Jeff in the sand. And twice Jeff came up, driving up, to force the big man back. They were fighting off their heels before long, squared off and slugging. And then Jeff drove inside again.

He got his left arm over Kelly's right, pinned it against his side. He got his forehead buried in Kelly's

left shoulder. He had the gate open then; he put his right hand in Kelly's middle, short and hard. He did it again and again.

And Kelly sagged. Jeff slammed two more home. Kelly's weight began to bear on his shoulders. Jeff let him go. He chopped a blow at Kelly's chin. Another. Kelly's eyes showed white. Jeff brought one from the ground. Kelly went down like a tall tree falling.

Jeff almost followed him. He caught himself on wide-spread feet, stood there, looking down at the inert Kelly. His chest was heaving and there was blood on his mouth. "You sonovagun!" he whispered.

"A good job," Sam Gallagher said.

Jeff swung around to face him.

"Maybe you get the idea now."

"Sure," Sam answered. "Stay right in there. Keep slugging. Never say die. And in the end virtue will emerge triumphant. Right?"

"Something like that."

Sam laughed. "There's one thing you overlook," he said, "— one small point. That Kelly can kick the hell out of me!"

There were a dozen men around the tool-shack when Jeff and Sam Gallagher approached. Most of these were lead-off shift men who'd made a long task of changing clothes. McWhitty was there, disapproval in his narrow look. Ikey stood on the steps, head and shoulders above the others, his small face wreathed in a broad grin.

"Sam," he called, "some eye you got!"

Bevins said, "Wait'll she turns green."

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"You should have seen the one that got away," Sam told them. He would have gone into the tool-shack then, but Jeff growled, "The First-Aid kit's in the office."

"I don't need that."

"Afraid Lea'll see you, Sam?"

Sam's eyes came up to meet the blunt challenge in Jeff's stare. "I see what you're pointing at," he said quietly. "You're the lad on the white horse. You want to prove it by showing Lea the wreckage."

Harshly, Jeff said, "You're crazy!"

Sam grinned. "Am I?" he said.

Lea Damaron was still at her desk when they came in. She looked at them, surprise distorting the smooth line of her lips. Sam Gallagher closed his one good eye in an elaborate wink. Lea Damaron stood up.

"You've been fighting!"

"Don't flatter him," said Jeff.

"Like a couple of children."

"No," Sam told her gravely, "that Kelly can hit harder than any child you ever saw."

Lea Damaron said, "Kelly — ?"

"The redhead." Gingerly, Sam touched his ear, puffed and swollen now. "He hung this on me. He put an eye out of commission and knocked a mess of ribs loose from their moorings. All in all, Kelly did right well."

"Until you quit!" Jeff snapped.

Lea's questioning eyes swung between them.

Sam said, "Tell her all about it, Jeff."

"I did," Jeff retorted. "You quit cold!"

"That's right," Sam admitted pleasantly. "I was out-manned and out-gunned. Kelly handed me all the licking I could use. So I went away from there."

"You ran," said Jeff.

Still pleasant, Sam said, "Staggered."

And Lea cried, "Stop it, you two!"

Sam Gallagher put his elbows on the counter. He had a faint grin for her, a wider grin for Jeff's angry glare. Lea crossed to the First-Aid kit; she took a package of iodine swabs from Jeff's hand and fumbled with the stubborn seal.

"I'll fix that cut," she said.

Jeff tipped his face to the light and she drew the swab across the cut on his cheek. He was looking at Sam, bitter distrust in his eyes.

Lea said, "Your hands now."

"Don't bother," Jeff said roughly.

Lea said, "You, Sam?"

"I've got a black eye and a tin ear," he said. "One needs raw steak; the other a doctor's lance." Sam turned his battered grin on Jeff. "Boss, exhibit-A would like to go home now. Okay?"

Curtly, Jeff said, "Yes, shove off."

Lea Damaron frowned. "Exhibit-A?"

"Jeff'll explain," said Sam.

The door closed behind him. Lea Damaron took a fresh swab from the package. "I'll clean those cuts on your hands now," she said.

"They're not important, Lea."

But he gave her first one hand, then the other. As she worked, Lea said, "What did Sam mean, Jeff?"

"I wanted you to see him."

"You ordered him to come here?"

"Yes," he said, eyes dark with thought. "There's something haywire. I told you that when Sam first came. He

said he had to have this job or stop eating, and that made no sense." He used his free hand to find a cigarette; he snapped a match into flame with his thumb-nail. "He tangled with Kelly and he got whipped. That part I can understand. Kelly's a lot of man; Sam hasn't been around long enough to harden in. But he ran, Lea. And a man who runs is a beaten man."

Lea Damaron said, "Yes?"

"Did he look beaten?"

"No, Jeff."

"There it is!" His voice turned rough. "That guy played a full half of a football game, in college, with a broken wrist. I remember a dance, up at the Lake, and a couple of loggers who'd been drinking whiskey full of boxing gloves. Sam had a go at both of them. He took a sweet pasting, but he didn't run. Lea, that brother of mine never ran from anything."

"This time he did."

"Damn it," he said. "I'll find out why!"

He left her then, pivoting swiftly away. Lea was moveless for a time, looking down at the floor, at the hand-size bright patch Jeff's caulks had torn there. Jeff was right. Sam had run from Kelly; he'd admitted it. And yet — there'd been a cold and cocky recklessness in the slant of his head, in the to-hell-with-you grin he'd thrown at them— Lea Damaron frowned. Then, suddenly, she took her coat from its hanger.

Her car was parked in an official stall, nosed up against the office shack. The guard at the supply gate gave her a half-salute as she drove through. Lea turned north. A dozen blocks away, a thick stream of men filed out through the main gate, crossing toward the vast expanse

of the parking lot, toward the yellow buses lined up at the curb.

She was waiting when he came out. She honked, and when he did not look at her, she called, "Sam! Sam Gallagher!"

He came to the car. "Yes, Lea?"

"I'm going your way. Hop in."

For perhaps ten seconds he considered this, his smile careful and guarded. Then he said, "Why not?"

She jockeyed the car into the flow of traffic. As they climbed the long hill, he turned to look back at the yard. "Funny about that place," he said. "You get busy with some little job and that's all you see. You have to get clear away before you realize how big the yard really is. Then the size of it stuns you."

"Do you like your job, Sam?"

"Yes, I like the pay, too."

"Jeff says you'll make a good hand."

"I imagine he's changed his mind now." A glint of laughter shone in Sam's one good eye. "Lea, that guy is one tough cookie. He took Kelly, but fast."

"Tough's not the word for Jeff."

"Could be you're right," he said. "But he's got what it takes, whatever you call him. He gave Kelly a lecture. You can't mess up my job, he told him. You're going to be a foreman in the morning. Then, just to prove his point, he knocked Kelly colder than a wedge. He was very cool about it, very deft. Made me think of a schoolteacher paddling an unruly pupil."

"He's competent," Lea said.

Sam chuckled. "So's a machine gun."

Quiet fell between them. Lea took the ramp that

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led upward to the bridge. The draw was open; they had to wait. She set the brake and switched the motor off.

"Why do you two hate each other?"

His smile faded. Softly he said, "Lady, you're getting into a closet that's jammed full of skeletons."

"Why?" she insisted.

"I burned down an Orphan Asylum."

"Is it because of your mother?"

He went on as though he hadn't heard. "Once he caught me pushing baby ducks in the water. But I think what really finished Jeff was the time I barbecued Gran'pop over a slow fire."

"So it's none of my business?"

He grinned. "What gives you that idea?"

"The whole thing's silly! You're both pig-headed and stubborn — that's all that's wrong. When you're not around, Jeff has only nice things to say about you. You do the same for him. Yet —"

"He can't forget Gran'pop," said Sam.

She turned to look down at the river where a tug labored with a string of giant barges. She was silent, thinking, Jeff's right. He's different. He won't let anyone get close to him —

"I like your hair-do," he said.

"You wouldn't be changing the subject?"

Again there was the bantering lightness in his voice — lightness which masked a wall of cool reserve. "Why not? Gran'pop makes pretty dull conversation."

"You could talk to Jeff. You could try —"

Quietly he said, "Skip it, Lea."

The bridge draw swung ponderously shut. A fat man

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in a shabby uniform hurried out to open the gates. Lea prodded the starter. It made an endless, futile whirring.

"Try turning the key," Sam suggested.

Color came to her cheeks. "Thanks."

They rode along a wide street, lightly traveled now. Sam said, "Our old hunting ground, remember, Lea? There used to be a skating rink out this way."

"There still is."

From that the talk turned to days that were gone: to dances at the Athletic Club, a treasure hunt that had sent them out to search the sleeping city for a billy-goat, and the badge from the cap of a traffic cop. For a moment Lea wondered if Sam had deliberately brought up the past, feeling on safer ground there. Then she forgot her doubt to laugh with him.

"We fixed that party," Sam said. "A fine, large idea you had. Bring the whole cop, if you can't get his badge. So I did, and he threw us all in the clink."

"He had no sense of humor."

"I had to sleep with the billy-goat."

She laughed again. "Sam! You didn't —"

Wryly, he said, "I've got scars to prove it."

They turned east, full in the face of the rowdy wind. Rain splattered the windshield. Brown leaves swirled in the brimming gutters; the naked trees had a drear and lonely look.

"It was going to be spring," he said.

"Don't go vague on me, Sam."

He looked at her, the shadow of old laughter haunting his mouth. He made a small, deft gesture in a remembered way. "It was spring then," he said, "and a lanky kid went off to splinter a lance against the stray wind-

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II

mills of the world. Very brash, that pup, very sure of himself. Much too big for his pants."

Lea Dameron said, "Sam —"

"Seven springs ago, Lea. I had an old shirt and four dollars and a bottle of silver polish to keep my illusions bright and shining. And I lost the silver polish and spent the four dollars, and a Swede sailor wandered off with my other shirt."

"What about the lance, Sam?"

"I threw it away," he said soberly. "I tossed it in a ditch after a flight of Stukas came down on a road crowded with refugees and showed me how it was. You need a machine gun now; lances are out of style. The windmills are all gone, Lea. They wrecked them and made tanks out of the scrap."

"Like that," she said.

His battered grin was oddly without bitterness. "So you remember the roses," he said. "The yellow roses climbing the lattice on your front porch. The way they smelled — Lea, a man can get drunk on roses. That porch swing. I swear your father fixed it so the darn thing squealed to the gods if I made a pass at you. And a fool bird, the night before I left, out there in the dark. singing his crazy head off."

She tried for lightness, but memory was a hurting ache in her throat. "That was a nightingale, Sam."

"Or a sparrow with a snoot-full."

Lea Dameron slowed the car for a boulevard stop. He lit two cigarettes and gave her one. She went on, driving slowly now, watching the street signs.

"Why so quiet?" he asked.

"I was thinking." She made a left-hand turn to reach

a street which curved down under trees that were big and old. "All this gets us nothing, Sam."

"Perhaps you're right."

"I know I am." She braked the car to a smooth stop at the curb. "Things have — have changed so."

He leaned toward her then, soft laughter on his lips. "Some things never change," he said, and touched her shoulder with a gentle hand. She tightened her grip on the wheel, then the nearness of him, the wanting became greater than her will. She let him tip her head back, for now her strength was gone. She did not close her eyes or move. Oddly, in that moment, she heard the rain tapping with friendly fingers on the glass. Sam Gallagher kissed her. And the rough, warm shock of it went deep to wake self-loathing which burned like fire in her cheeks.

"Don't!" she said. "Please, Sam —"

"You lied, Lea. It hasn't changed."

"It did — this very now."

She turned away from his searching gaze, voice clouded and husky. "Look around you, Sam. I brought you home. I was cheap enough to let you kiss me here; and that kiss was more than half my fault. So what does that make me?"

"Wait," he said roughly. "You —"

"You're home, Sam. This's where you live!"

His mouth tightened. Something that might have been anger or bitterness flicked across his face and was instantly gone. In that wisp of time, Lea wondered why he was so constantly on guard.

"It was my fault, Lea," he said. "All mine. Gallagher's about half wolf, I guess. But there's no great harm done. One kiss is hardly a seduction." He smiled a little. "Call

it a salute to the past. One off the arm for a couple of kids who're gone — along with the windmills, the broken lance, and the sparrow who got drunk on the smell of roses."

"Sam, may I come in?"

Again she sensed a guarded tightening in him.

"Sure, Lea. Let's have at it."

They went up the walk together. Sam opened the door, then stepped aside to let her pass. The entrance hall gave upon a room warm with color, a room which had a friendly, lived-in look. A fire spluttered cheerfully behind a screen of bronze mesh. Lea Dameron said, "Nice, Sam." Then she saw the boy who lay on his stomach in front of the fireplace, engrossed in the pages of a book.

Sam said, "Hi, Paul."

"Gallagher!" The boy rolled and scrambled to his feet, small face shining. He saw Lea then, and sobered instantly.

"This's Miss Dameron," Sam said.

Paul bent his head. "How do you do."

Lea smiled. "Hello, Paul."

"Where's Mother?" Sam asked.

"In the basement. Washing."

Sam said, "I'll be right back, Lea."

He went through a swinging door and was gone. A moment later Lea heard voice sound, dim and wordless, from somewhere deep in the house. Lea spread her hands to the warmth of the fire and looked at the boy. He was fair, small, and somehow old beyond his years.

"Do you like it here?" she said.

"Yes," he said, "but it rains a lot."

"Summer'll be coming soon."

"That's what Gallagher says."

She got a cigarette from a package in her purse, wondering briefly why this grave, well-mannered child used the surname in speaking of his father. Then Paul was beside her, wordlessly offering a packet of matches.

She said, "You're very thoughtful, Paul."

"Thank you," he said. "Here's Mother now."

Lea turned to face the inner door, the woman who preceded Sam Gallagher into the room. She felt her throat go cold. She's beautiful! was the dismayed thought that whispered through her mind. Then Sam was murmuring names, "Lea, this is Jill, my wife." Jill's eyes were grey, coolly grey, and they sought Lea's in a measuring glance.

"I'm glad you came," she said.

"I would pick wash-day."

"Every day is wash-day when you've two children." Jill's smile was white, warm. "Won't you sit down?"

"Just for a moment," Lea said.

Paul moved across the room to stand beside Jill's chair. Sam busied himself needlessly with the fire and then stood up to say, "If you gals can spare me, I think I'll make us a drink."

"Don't bother —" Lea began.

"This," Sam said, "is a labor of love."

He disappeared through the swinging door. Jill said, "He likes to play host." And Lea wondered at the faint amusement in her voice. Jill was curled in a deep chair now, her dark head bent. She wore slacks of faded brown, water-splashed and old; her sleeves were rolled above the elbow.

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"Sam tells me you're old friends."

"We went to school together," said Lea.

"It was nice of you to bring him home."

"We work the same shift. He and Jeff were in the office today, after the —"

Quietly, Jill said, "After the fight?"

Lea nodded, not trusting herself to speak.

"Sam said he ran into a revolving Irishman."

"Did Gallagher win?" Paul asked suddenly.

"I didn't hear the details," said Lea.

Jill rumbled the boy's hair. "Why don't you trot out in the kitchen and ask Sam?" she said. "He'll tell you the whole story."

Paul said, "Righto, Mother."

"He's a handsome chap," Lea said, when Paul had gone. "Most boys his age aren't as polite, or as considerate. Perhaps that's because he's traveled so much."

"Perhaps."

"Were you glad to get back to the States?"

"Very glad," said Jill.

For a time the only sound was the soft crackling of the fire. Lea Dameron tossed her cigarette into the flames and watched it curl and char.

"Sam didn't write any of us," she said. "Not for ages. We were all surprised to hear he was married and had a family. Because you don't think of foreign correspondents as family men, I guess. He told Jeff and me about you the other morning. We couldn't have been more astonished if he'd conjured you up with a silk hat and a magician's wand."

"Three of us out of a hat — Paul, Gretchen, and me?" Jill smiled. "That would have been quite a trick."

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"Gretchen? Is she the youngest?"

"Yes, she's napping now."

"Were you in newspaper work too?"

"Of a sort," said Jill.

"And you were married abroad?"

"Yes, in Paris."

Sam Gallagher returned then, with Paul hard on his heels. Sam carried a tray laden with glasses on the spread fingers of his left hand. "A little trade secret I picked up in college," he said. "I earned my keep for two weeks, working as a hasher. I'd probably be there yet, but for the unfortunate incident of the President's wife and the soup." He chuckled. "Was she burned!"

"That's heavy humor," Jill said.

"Not for me." Sam grinned, and set the tray down with a flourish. "Ladies, have refreshment."

Coolly, Jill said, "Not now, thanks."

"Sorry," said Lea. "I have to go."

"You just got here," Sam protested.

"And I have to run." Lea was on her feet now. She turned to Jill. "I've pried shamefully," she said. "But all of us, all of Sam's old friends, have wondered about you and the children, and Sam wouldn't talk. Now I can tell them you're much too good for him."

"Insults," said Sam. "Fine thing!"

Jill said, "You must come again."

"I shall," said Lea. "It's been fun."

Sam walked out to the car with her. They said good-bye in the rain. As she pulled away, Lea caught a last glimpse of Sam's face. The guarded tightness was gone; he looked old, utterly tired. That seemed natural enough. He had a right to be tired. Then she remembered how

swiftly his face had changed and aged. And doubt came to nag at her mind.

She thought back over her meeting with Paul and Jill Gallagher. She had sensed something — a watchful unease, an alertness — from the beginning. Sam brought home a black eye and an old girl friend, she told herself. If he'd been my husband, I'd have cut his throat! But Jill had been wary, rather than angry. She'd answered questions as briefly as possible; she'd volunteered no information about herself. That part's all right, Lea thought. But it's funny she wouldn't talk about her children. Any woman will, unless — unless she's hiding something!

Jill was sitting cross-legged in front of the fire when Sam Gallagher came in. She did not look up. He took a cigarette from a glass box on the coffee table. The crack of the lighting match was loud against the silence.

"That was a pretty lady," Paul said.

"Gallagher thinks so," said Jill.

"You're right, McCann." He looked down, watching the play of firelight on her hair. "And along about now I'm ready to go for the theory that some women should be hammered until they ring like gongs."

"Then you'll have two bum eyes," she said.

Sam said, "Paul, how's for you to run and play?"

"Do I have to, sir?" the boy asked.

"Yes," said Jill. "And don't worry. Gallagher was being funny. That's his idea of a joke."

Sam nodded. "She's right, Paul."

The boy left them, pausing in the doorway for a long backward glance. Jill tilted her head to look up at Sam. "I was rough with the pretty lady," she said. "And I meant to be. We can go on from there."

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"I'd like to strangle you," he growled.

"I know that." There was the shine of anger in Jill's eyes. "But we — you have a job to do. Remember? This marriage, the house, the children — they're all part of the stage dressing, the background. Fine! But there never was a stage set made that would fool a person who stood in the wings."

"Wait!" he said. "My friends —"

"Your friends will stay away; you'll see that they do! They know too much about you, Mr. Gallagher. They'd kick this little play of ours full of holes. Sooner or later, one of us would slip. We're supposed to have been married seven years. You left here seven years and eight months ago. If I was your wife —"

"God forbid!" he said.

"If we'd lived together seven years," she went on, "then I'd know the things I'm supposed to know — all the crazy little details that can sink us. The way it is, I don't know anything. We haven't even had time to decide where we met and how. Where the children were born. Or what jobs you've held."

"We'll have to talk about that."

"Thanks." Some of the acid went out of her voice. "I don't care what you do away from the house. Play tag with the pretty lady all day long, if you wish. That's between you, your conscience, and Mr. Thane. My job is here. I mean to do it as well as you'll let me."

"No more company," he said. "I promise."

"Please remember that," said Jill softly.

He threw his cigarette in the fire. He scowled at the untouched glasses on the tray. "I think I'll drink all three

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of those. I can use them. Today was not one of my better days."

"What happened?"

"Plenty — all bad."

"Did you contact Parrish?"

He shook his head. "That yard isn't run for the convenience of guys like me, McCann. I have to take it as it comes. Parrish wasn't there today."

"But Kelly was?"

"Yes," said Sam, and his mouth pulled down in the wry way. "And I lost my head when he took a swing at me. I went for the guy, and I got kicked out of shape. Then I ran, McCann. I ran like a dog."

Surprise widened her eyes. "Why?"

"I was groggy for one thing — that Kelly hits like a piledriver. We were fighting in the water. He got to me and I went down. As I came up, I got a look at the crowd. Word of the fight had spread on the wind. Everybody and his brother was there to watch. It scared me silly, McCann."

"Scared you?"

"Yes. I remembered what Thane had said. He told me to stay in the background; he was definite about it. But there I was, in the middle of the stage, slugging it out with Kelly in the main event."

"So you ran?"

"And that was a mistake, McCann. I knew it as soon as my head stopped rattling. If I had stayed, the fight would've been forgotten as soon as it was over. A fight doesn't mean much to a construction man. One guy wins; one guy gets whipped. So what? But I had to be different. I ran. Now every man who saw the fight will

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remember me. I'm the guy who didn't have the guts to stay and take a licking."

"Not so good," said Jill.

"The running's the part I hate. Kelly's a lot of man; too much for me. But I'd have given him something to remember if I could've gotten him ashore."

"Mr. Thane will be angry."

"With reason," said Sam. "I blew everything I touched today. I got in a fight. I got whipped. I ran. I brought Lea home — I guess that's the whole list."

Jill got to her feet. "Not quite."

He scowled. "What else did I do?"

"You kissed the pretty lady," said Jill coolly. "I was upstairs then. I heard the car stop and looked to see who it was. I was just in time."

A red flush darkened his face. "I —"

"The neighbors think we're married, Mr. Gallagher. Most married men don't bring their girl friends home. You gave them something to talk about."

He said, "Report it to Thane."

"I will," she snapped, "believe me!"

The tucked-in smile touched his battered mouth. "You do a lot of talking about our marriage and the pretty lady, McCann. Too much talking." His voice was light, edged with laughter. "I think you're jealous."

"And I think you're crazy!"

"Could be," he said.

For a moment they faced each other, Jill by the fireplace, her shoulders against the low mantel. A slow breath lifted her breasts; his grin had a reckless slant. Then, almost lazily, he moved toward her. Puzzled, she waited until it was too late. He took her face between

his hands, laughing softly. He bent his head and kissed her. Then he stepped away.

"Now you and Lea are even — darling wife."

Jill slapped him across the mouth.

"I told you," she panted. "I told you not to touch me. Next time I'll use a club on you. I'll —"

"Cut my heart out?" he said.

"Yes! As a beginning."

"This seems to be the day Gallagher gets his ears knocked down." He lifted his head, still holding his crooked smile. "You can put away your heavy artillery, McCann. One helping of that is plenty for me. And good-bye now. I'm going to bed."

She watched him cross the room and climb the stairs. He had reached the landing when she called, "Mr. Gallagher, I think you should know where we were married. I told —"

"I do know," he said, and there was disgust in his voice. "Remember the old one about marriages being made in heaven? This is the exception to the rule. This one came from further south."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE alarm went off at three A.M. Sam Gallagher was no more than half awake when he reached the bathroom. The face he found in the mirror there gave him a distinct shock. One eye was black, swollen completely shut; one ear was hugely puffed. And he bore other marks of Kelly's fists: a purplish welt on one cheek-bone, his lips were puffed and bruised.

"Gallagher," he said, "you're a ruin!"

His lunch was packed and waiting for him in the refrigerator. A note which said, "Good luck, Sam," lay on his plate. He looked at that a long time, smiling, and then tucked it in his shirt pocket. Jill was swell people. Her job here was a rough chore for any woman. After yesterday, Sam decided, she should have used an ax; instead, she wishes me luck with Parrish.

There was a fat man on the bus who stared at Sam Gallagher throughout the long ride to the yard. Twice he seemed about to speak, but not until the bus stopped in front of the main gate did he whisper his question.

"What happened to you, friend?"

"We've got mice at our house," Sam said.

The tool-shack and the office stood out plainly in the brilliant glare of work lights. There was wind from the east, sharply cold and clean. The sky was clear. Shift time was just fifteen minutes away when Sam Gallagher found Ikey and Bevins, out on the rim of the darkness.

"Sam," Ikey said, "how's she goin', boy?"

"Fair enough," said Sam.

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Bevins grinned. "How're the hands?"

"They're kind of sore," said Sam.

"That's the way it is with me," said Ikey. "I get me in a brawl an' I can't use my hands for a week." He tipped his head to look at the sky. "Stars," he said, "and a chunk of moon. First I seen for a solid month. They got 'em all shined up, too."

"Take a look over there."

This was Bevins' voice, low and amused. He was watching the men who milled in the open space in front of the tool-shack.

"Is that the new crew?" Sam asked.

Ikey said, "Yeah — the Sunday pilebucks."

They were an odd lot, these new men. About what you'd get if you cleaned out a bus or a railroad station. All kinds, types, and ages. Sam saw a grinning kid, too young for the draft; and an old man in a shabby blue business suit. There were overalls and slacks in the crowd. One chap, a lean, gray whip of a man, wore a college letterman's sweater.

Sam thought: No wonder Kelly tried to quit!

"Look at their feet," said Bevins.

Ikey nodded. "Ain't more'n two got caulks."

"Or tools," said Bevins, "or anything. It'd take six o' them guys to make one good Boy Scout. I hope to God Jeff don't shove one of them off on me."

"He will," said Ikey. "He's got to."

Sam said, "Is that the way it's done?"

"Sure." There was an odd soberness in Ikey's small face. "In normal times, none of that bunch'd last long enough to spit. Now, as bad's they need men, I'd guess half of them'll make the grade — the rest'll quit or get

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fired. But they got to learn. So Jeff'll split up the crews to pair old-heads with new men. That way he'll keep 'em from makin' too many mistakes."

"First, though," Bevins said, "they've got Russ."

"Russ?" Sam asked.

"The lemme-see-your-card guy. The Steward."

"I remember," said Sam. "He's short and walks with a limp. Works with Whitey Johnson."

"You got him. Our Union representative." Bevins voice turned on bitterness. "And here he is."

Russ came from the tool-shack, a short man, sharp-featured and dark. There was a thin set to his face — a perpetual frown, Sam thought. Russ went to the new men, his limping stride somehow a strut of importance.

"Line up," he told them. "Get them permits out where I can see 'em, and gimme a look at your face."

A rough line was formed, leading away from Russ and the pool of light where Russ stood. Each man held out in his turn the slip of paper he'd brought from the Union hiring hall. Russ checked them and gave them back.

"It's good for a week," he said. "Be damn' sure you get your next one."

"What's this permit?" Sam asked Bevins.

"Ain't you got one?"

"I've got a Union card."

"A got-rocks, eh?" Bevins laughed. "Well, these birds ain't got no rocks. No forty bucks for the initiation fee. So the Local gives 'em a permit to work. Costs two and a half a week. Soon as they get the forty bucks they join the Local. Then all they got to pay is the two six bits a month dues."

Ikey nudged Sam. "Russ's caught one."

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There was a tall man talking to Russ. A man in his middle forties, gray-haired, lean. He faced Russ without dropping his shoulders, or lowering his chin — a man squarely on the line between apology and defiance.

"It was in Thirty-three!" Russ's voice was high and angry. "That long-shore strike."

"It might have been," the man admitted.

"You know damn' well it was!"

"Have it your way, then."

"A scab!"

Russ's voice held a dripping disgust — "Like he found a worm in his soup," Ikey said later. Russ pushed his face close to the tall man, a twisted face, white as the cords of his neck were white.

"I get a kick outa you bastards. You took that job when honest men were goin' hungry. Goin' hungry so they could make a decent livin' when they went back to work. You scabbed. Then you come suckin' around for a job with the same Goddam men!"

"Most of us were hungry in Thirty-three," the tall man said. "My family was. I did a lot of things to feed them — jobs you wouldn't touch. I'd do it again."

"Sure you would — a scab ain't never anything else!" Russ tore the man's permit across, then across again. He threw it back at him. "Here's one job you ain't gonna do. We got no place for —" the word was completely obscene — "around here. Beat it!"

The tall man looked at Russ. It was a white, set look, full of violence, and for a moment, Sam Gallagher thought he was going to hit Russ. But the tall man didn't. Perhaps he saw the hundreds of men behind Russ, saw the utter futility in a fight like this. Whatever

he thought, he kept it to himself and turned away.

"Whew!" Ikey whispered. "That Russ lays it on —"

Thinly, Bevins said, "Too damned much!"

The line of men was moving again, showing permits and moving on. Toward the end of the line was the old man in the shabby blue suit. There was something wrong with him — trouble was in the old man's bearing. Trouble and desperation and something akin to fear.

"Where's the permit?" Russ asked.

"I — I ain't got one —"

"You ain't—" Russ let go a long, surprised breath. "Didn't you come outa the hall?"

"Yes, but I —"

"Didn't Frank give you a permit?"

Confusedly, the old man blurted, "I didn't have the price. I thought maybe if I come down here, you'd let me work till I got it. The first money would —"

"Good Christ!" Russ said.

He turned to the men with a gesture that said, "Can you beat that?" Helplessly, the old man waited, chin on his chest, as if wishing he had a board to crawl under. Russ turned to him again.

"So you ain't got two and a half!" he said. "A lousy two-bucks-fifty! You can't get it. You got nothin' you can sell or hock. You got nobody to loan it to you."

The old man nodded.

"Bull —" Russ slashed the air with his hand. "Get out of here!" he rasped. "Get you a hatful of pencils and do your chiseling on the skid-road. Beat it!"

The old man went away. Russ stamped into the office with his list of men who could work. And Bevins turned to Sam Gallagher.

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"How d'you like the Union now?"

Thoughtfully, Sam said, "It's a problem. The tall man had to eat back in Thirty-three. He took the only job he could get — strike-breaking. You can't blame him for it. But you can hardly expect the Union to love a man it's had to fight." Sam shrugged his shoulders. "And behind the old guy there's an army of chiselers waiting to follow him through the gate."

Ikey said, "But the way Russ done it."

Sam nodded. "No excuse for that."

A man in a dark stag-coat leaned back to say, "That Russ works as hard for you as he does again' you. I've heard him take the hide off'n Lessing. Got us a dry-shed, didn't he? An' a tool-shack, and extra pay for water-work. What the hell good's a steward that ain't mad at nobody?"

"No good," Ikey said.

Bevins said, "What the hell good's a Union?"

It was blasphemy, and it sent a wave of silence through the men, a breath-held silence, the kind a shouted curse would bring in church. If it bothered Bevins, he didn't show it; he gave them a to-hell-with-you grin. And no man moved. Perhaps the size of Bevins prevented that. More likely they were remembering his clean-limbed strength, his willingness to use it on any job, tough or not, without complaint. Whatever it was, he had their respect, a respect that made them listen.

"What's your beef?" someone asked.

"It's like the time," Bevins said, "when I come outa the woods with a stake. I got myself fallin' down drunk. I fell down in an alley. This monkey comes up and rolls me. I'm lyin' there. I can see 'im. I can feel 'im goin'

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through my pockets. But I'm so Goddam drunk I can't lift a hand to stop him." Bevins gestured. "That's the Union, only they got both hands in my pockets."

"When did the Union ever roll you?"

"A month ago," Bevins said. "I got an offer to go riggin' in the yard. Lead man. So I went. The first night a guy comes up — he's the Boilermaker's steward. 'Got a card?' he says. Sure I got a card. I show him my Pile-driver's card. It ain't no good. I learn my riggin' in the Piledrivers — we do more than any Boilermaker ever done. But the Boilermakers got the riggin' in the yard. So I got to have a Boilermaker's card."

The man in the stag-coat grinned. "Them Boilermakers — a stinkin' bunch of thieves."

"To me," said Bevins, "they all smell the same. But I went down to the hall and told 'em I want to transfer to the Boilermakers. No transfers, they say. It's A. F. of L., isn't it? I pay my dues to the District Council, don't I? Makes no difference. This is the Boilermakers. No forty bucks, no card, no work. Okay, I give 'em the dough. 'Where do you wanta work?' he says. I tell him I got a job. 'You can't do that!' he yells, like he'd just caught me in bed with his wife. I got to come down there and kiss him for a job. He sends me out when he gets ready. And he sends me wherever he damn' well takes a notion."

The man in the stag-coat said, "But it ain't like that in the Piledrivers."

"I'll get around to them," Bevins said. "So I finally talked the guy into sending me to this job I already had. I go to work. Then I get to thinkin', why do I pay dues in two locals? I ain't usin' my Pile-driver's card. So I call

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up the Piledriver's local. Do I got to pay them dues. No. What I should do is get a withdrawal. How does it work? If I go to work with the Piledrivers within a year, all I got to pay is fifteen bucks reinstatement fee. But if it's more than a year, I got to pay forty bucks initiation, just like I never was a pilebuck."

"Anything to get forty bucks," Ikey said.

Someone asked, "Why didn't you let the Piledrivers' dues slide?"

"Then," Bevins told him, "I'm in the doghouse with the District Council of the Union. I'm a son-of-a-bitch that won't pay dues. They pull my Piledriver's card. They pull my Boilermaker's card. So I don't work no place till I fork over a whackin' big fine."

"Pay, pay, pay," Ikey said. "Maybe the poor bastards are hard up?"

Bevins laughed. "You know the biggest department store in town? It was in the paper they got a gross take of two hundred and fifty grand a month. Outa that they pay for what they sell, they pay their help and they pay for that block-size, twelve-story building. The Boilermakers, now — they got fifty thousand members, payin' two-bucks-fifty a month. The same take, see? An' all they put out is for a long line of windows where you pay your dues."

"They've got a fine big bar," the man in the stag-coat said. "A bowling alley and club rooms."

Ikey snickered. "I'll give you fifteen bucks if you c'n buy me a nickel beer at that bar."

Bevins said, "It's for the big shots."

Someone in the crowd had done some figuring. He spoke up in an awed voice, "Jesus! Three million bucks a

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year! Outa this one local. What they do with that dough?"

Loudly, Bevins said, "Anybody know?"

There was no answer.

"That's right!" Bevins gestured sharply. "Banks or insurance companies, or stores — they gotta publish what they do with their money. But not the Union. Nobody knows what happens to their dough. It goes East, they say. Well, maybe to elect a president — I heard that's what it does."

The man in the stag-coat's face was red. As a last defense, he said, "But look at the good the Union does. Look at your pay-check!"

"I look at it," Bevins said. "For maybe ten minutes, I look at it. Then I take this buck-and-a-half an hour I'm makin', and I go pay thirteen cents for a loaf of bread, fourteen for a quart of milk, three bucks a quart for whiskey. That pay-check lasts quick. Then I got the rest of the week to wonder how come the six-bits an hour I made five years ago went just as far and farther."

The whistle blew, then, and the bulk of the men moved off to their jobs. Jeff lined up Kelly's crew. Half the twenty-five men were old hands, the rest green men. He told Sam, Ikey, Bevins and Brownie to wait, and went with Kelly into the darkness. While the men were waiting a short, ruddy-faced pilebuck came up and spoke to Bevins.

"It done me good," he said.

"What's that, O'Hara?"

"The way you pasted the Union," O'Hara said. "I been wantin' to, but I never had the guts." He laughed. "I got a face-full o' them Boilermakers."

"Look!" Ikey said, "another beef."

O'Hara nodded. "I took a shipfitter's job in the yard a month ago. The Shipfitters come under the Boilermakers, same as riggin'. I was lead-man on the bilge-jigs. You know how they do it. They build a section of the boat on jigs — put in the frames, the brackets, the stiffeners. 'Erection-section,' they call it. Then they take the section down and weld 'er into the boat. That's how they make their speed."

"A smart rig," Ikey said.

"Sure, it is," O'Hara agreed. "An' they get them ships built, in spite of the Union an' all them departments."

"Departments?" Sam asked.

"Like this," said O'Hara. "In the Boilermakers, ever' guy's got one job. He does that and nuthin' else. He's a chipper, or a rigger, or a burner, or a tacker, or a welder, or a lay-down man. All right. So I got a section to build. I got a crew waitin' to go to work. First I need a chipping done. A baby c'n run a chipping gun, see? But I can't touch one — the Union'd pull my card. Nobody in my crew can touch one."

"They got a lot of chippers, ain't they?"

"No more'n enough," O'Hara said. "But I can't just grab one; I got to see his lead-man. They's a lead-man for every department, see? I see his lead-man and the lead-man sends him over — if I can find the lead-man, if the lead-man likes the way I kiss him, or if he ain't got somethin' else for him to do. Well, I get a chipper. He does his five minutes work. Meantime, I'm off lookin' for the burner lead-man, an' the riggin' lead-man, and the welder lead-man an' the lay-down man."

"Do you find 'em?" Ikey asked.

"Maybe I do, maybe not," O'Hara said. "It's a good

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bet that I don't find one of 'em. Or if I do, that he ain't got a man to send me. All this time my crew is just standin'. 'Bout the time I get all lined up, the whistle blows and it's time to eat. Half a day gone, and I ain't hit a lick."

Sam said, "That explains the standing around."

Emphatically, O'Hara said, "It does! The way they got it rigged, there ain't a man does more than an hour's work a shift. He can't! He's always got to wait for somebody to do somethin' first!" O'Hara spat disgustedly. "But it takes three times the men — it puts three times the dough in the Union's bank-roll."

"And there's a shortage of manpower," Sam said.

"Bull!" O'Hara said. "They're just wastin' it!"

Bevins had been thinking. "Look," he said. "If it was like that in the pilebucks. If you wanted something sawed, go get a cross-cut saw man. A spike drove, get a top-maul man. A drift-pin cut, get a burner. A drift-pin drove, get a jack-hammer man. If you wanted a plank, get a helper to pick it up for you. Christ! You'd never get anything done!"

"Hey!" Ikey's face was lighted with an inspiration. "Get a load of this: We're in the army, see? We got an anti-tank gun set up. They's a big tank comin' over the hill. Cold turkey. We got a bead on him — everything. But we don't shoot. A officer comes runnin' up. 'Shoot the son-of-a-bitch!' he yells. I give him a disgusted look. 'Can't,' I says. 'The pull-the-trigger man's gone to take a —'"

Bevins and O'Hara liked that very much.

But not Sam Gallagher. To Sam it wasn't funny. It was pathetic and utterly wrong, the biggest flaw he'd found

in Betsy yet. To Sam it seemed that Betsy's crankshaft was out of balance, that her clutch slipped so badly that she functioned only a third of the time. He'd tell McCann about this, he thought. Then he decided not to. Such a thing would do no good. It would be like telling her the cop on the beat was afraid of the dark —

Jeff Gallagher came back.

"You'll work with Brownie, Sam."

Sam bent his head. "Can do."

He was moving away with Brownie, when he saw Dave Parrish crossing through a patch of light. "I'll meet you on the job," he told Brownie.

"Right, Sam," Brownie said and went along.

Sam was beside Parrish then. He touched Parrish's arm and the man turned. His rough-hewn face was splashed with shadow. "Yes?" he said.

"You talked to me," said Sam carefully, "about riding back and forth to the yard with you. I could go for that proposition now."

"You're too late. I got a full car."

"Couldn't you squeeze me in?"

"No," said Parrish, "I couldn't."

There was a flat finality in his voice; his eyes had turned wary. Cold disappointment swelled up in Sam Gallagher. I might have swung it yesterday, he thought bitterly. But not now — not with a new crew on the job!

He said, "You must be pretty busy."

"I keep movin'," Parrish said.

"Sam!" Brownell called. "Let's get started."

"Coming," Sam Gallagher replied.

The day stretched emptily ahead of him, endless as the rows of deck spikes he drove with the nailing gun.

He'd planned to ride with Parrish, to somehow use the contact as a wedge. He'd tried and missed. And he knew why. Parrish had already checked him off as safe. The Seaboard crew was the key in whatever was to come. Thus, Parrish, and those like him, would be busy checking the new men now. Checking the stand-outs, those who knew nothing about the work, and who, because of this, might not be what they said they were.

I would mess it up! Sam Gallagher thought.

Daylight was still an hour away when he dropped the spiking gun. "Brownie," he said, "I'm thirsty."

Brownie grinned. "Have one for me."

Sam Gallagher went up the slanting deck of the shipway. Crossing a Whirley trestle, he rounded the carrier's bow to reach the main walkway. There was a drinking fountain on his left then. Beyond this, built hard against the braces of a trestle, was the rigger's shack. A work light spilled its white blaze across the doorway. An overalled man crouched there, busy with a needle-pointed marlin spike and shining cable. Sam Gallagher bent over the drinking fountain.

"McWhitty!" he called softly.

The man's head came up, light shimmering on his glasses. Sam Gallagher straightened. He fumbled for a cigarette, squinting into the glare.

"How's she goin'?" he asked.

McWhitty didn't answer. The stiff turn of his head showed eyes narrow and desperate. Sam Gallagher moved deliberately away, heading down into the dark along the carrier's flank. Behind him, the marlin spike thudded on the deck. A moment later the lights blinked out.

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Sam was standing under the trestle, opposite the high curve of the carrier's stern, when McWhitty came. The darkness was full and heavy here, broken only by the dim, distant glow of small lights under the carrier's keel. Sam leaned against a piling. He waited until the man was abreast of him.

"This way," he said.

McWhitty wheeled around, his spud wrench a dim shining in his hand. "Damn you!" he whispered thickly.

"I tried Parrish," said Sam. "No soap."

"I heard you had an in. What happened?"

"He didn't want to play," said Sam.

Somewhere in the far darkness, a chipping hammer let go with its machine-gun roaring. McWhitty started violently at the sound.

"Easy," said Sam. "You'll turn inside out."

"I'm leavin'!" McWhitty panted. "I —"

Sam Gallagher caught his arm. "Not yet," he said, and pulled him close. "Parrish brushed me off. Simms is my only chance now. I've never seen the guy. You'll have to spot for me."

"I can't, man. Honest to God, I —"

Quietly, Sam said, "You must."

"We're takin' damn' fool chances the way it is! Once these guys tumble, you an' me won't last long —" He rubbed a gloved hand across his mouth. "Look. Simms is a carpenter. He works with the maintenance and repair crew. He might be any place in the yard. How —?"

"Wreck something," said Sam.

McWhitty's shadowed face came up. His whisper was thin and faint against the rumble of a crane overhead.

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"That might do it. On the Whirley trestle above where you're workin'. The office'd send his bunch down, an' I could spot him for you without bein' seen."

Sam Gallagher said, "Good enough."

"It'll take time. A day, maybe two."

"Do the best you can," said Sam.

The next day it rained, rained steadily and hard. "I might as well work in the river," Sam told Jill. "I couldn't get any wetter. And that spiking gun gets a man. Eight hours of it and you can't straighten your back."

Quietly, she said, "What about Simms?"

"Tomorrow," he said. "For sure."

It was the third morning, just after the lead-off shift had gone to work, when trouble struck at the outboard end of the Whirley trestle. Thick mist lay over the water. Stirred by the fitful wind, it was a gray and smoky drift in the white wash of the widely scattered lights. No more than a dozen of these lights dotted the slant of the new shipway, one for each team or crew of pilebucks busy there.

Sam Gallagher worked with the spiking gun in the half-dark, near the trestle's base. Tom Brownell was a kneeling shadow, some distance away. Between them were rows of undriven deck spikes. A sullen rumble told of the coming of the great crane. Gallagher peered up to watch it pass, a dim shape cloaked in swirling mist, then bent to his task again.

And the tearing crash ripped across the dark. It brought Sam upright. This is it! he thought, and felt the muscles of his stomach draw up cold and tight. Shouts came from far out in the mist now. Someone bel-

lowed an oath. Deliberately, Brownell got to his feet. He moved to Sam's side, frowning and thoughtful.

"Sounds like trouble," he said.

"I wonder if anyone was hurt?"

Brownie took his pipe from his mouth. "I doubt it. I didn't hear them yelling for First-Aid men."

"I didn't think of that," Sam said.

A stocky foreman gave them the story.

"Sling got fouled in the deck," he shouted from the trestle. "Messed up some plank, an' maybe sprung one o' the rails. I'm phonin' for a repair gang now."

"These things happen," Brownie said.

"Yes," said Sam. "They do."

It was still dark when the repair crew arrived. They passed, outbound on the trestle above, shadowy figures laden with lumber and tools. Sam Gallagher left the spiking gun.

"I've got a thirst," he said.

Brownie smiled. "Salty bacon, eh?"

"Nope," said Sam. "Hangover."

He rounded the carrier's bow to find a dim light burning in the rigger's shed. He reached the drinking fountain before he saw McWhitty crouching over a coil of cable close-by. Sam bent to drink. McWhitty did not lift his head; his whisper was thin, strained.

"Tall guy. Hook nose. Moustache."

"You'll have to pull him out of that gang."

"Ten minutes," said McWhitty. "Fifteen."

"I'll be waiting," said Sam.

He went back the way he'd come, crossing the Whirley trestle at the head of the new shipway going down the slant of the deck toward the water. The trestle was on

his right, flat-decked, running out into the misty dark. At first, its deck was on a level with Sam's knees, then it was hip-high, then shoulder high.

At intervals, stairways bridged the gap between trestle deck and the shipway. Two of these had been completed; flood lights marked them now. The third was but a timber skeleton, hard by the spiking gun. And here the deck of the trestle was a full fifteen feet above Sam's head.

He moved the floodlight before he started work again, tilting it to throw a part of its glare upward across the trestle. Then he moved down a row of spikes, the gun thundering in his hands. He saw McWhitty pass, out-bound. He worked on through the slow moments, a dry tightness in his throat.

McWhitty came back alone. He looked down at Sam, lips moving. He tipped his head in a brief, sharp nod, and hurried on. Sam Gallagher sought the shadows, moving up the shipway to a place where the trestle deck was but four feet above his head. Here a floodlight threw its pool of radiance on the empty deck. And here a peevee stood like a black exclamation mark, forgotten by some careless workman.

There was time to search the near-by dark with a careful glance. A hundred feet away, McWhitty paused and turned. The tall man strode into the light.

"Hey!" Sam called. "Just a second."

The tall man slowed, then stopped. The light was above and behind him; the brim of his tin hat threw a black slash of shadow across his hawk nose. Sam could see only his chin, his full lips, the thin pencil line of his moustache.

"Is your name Simms?" he asked.

"That's right."

The tall man came to the deck edge and crouched there. Sam Gallagher looked up. He smiled, though a dim warning tolled far back in his mind.

"I heard about you," he said. "A guy —"

The rest died on his lips. Simms had stiffened suddenly; the cords of his neck stood out, whip-tight against the flesh. His hands came up in an odd, jerky way. And then he whirled. His hat went up and back; the light fell strongly across his high-boned face.

"You!" Sam Gallagher breathed.

Simms had the peevee. He wrenched it free of the deck — five feet of stout wood, shod in heavy metal — and the swing of his arms carried it up to shoulder height. The hook flopped back; the peevee's point was a wicked shining. Simms held it as you would hold a short and clumsy spear. He took two running steps and threw it straight at Sam Gallagher's head.

Sam was moving backward, stumbling. He ducked, and pain raked across his neck. The peevee turned just a little in the air; the handle's tip smashed along Sam's jaw. He went down to his knees. For an instant he was dazed, blind. Roaring filled his head. Simm's curse came to him as faint, small sound; he saw the tall man wheel and lunge across the trestle. And dimly he knew McWhitty was running, slanting off into the dark.

He tried to come erect, fighting the drag of inertia. Then the icy shock of panic broke within his mind, and he was up, charging into the black beneath the trestle. A brace caught him savagely across the legs. He fell

and there was loose sand under his hands. A plank bulk-head reared up to block the way.

Simms was not in sight when he vaulted the rail of the walkway. Above Sam was the swelling curve of the carrier's flank. Around him were the heavy timbers of the scaffolding; ahead was the forest of shoring which supported the ship's belly. Widely scattered crimson bulbs burned dimly here. Far up the way and deep under the ship a floodlight made its splash of white. And there was noise: the intermittent bellow of chipping hammers and rivet guns, the slow and steady boom of a shipwright's sledge against steel hull.

Sam Gallagher went on. He bent over, for the slope of the hull pressed down as he neared the keel. He was sweating, panting for breath. No chance! was his bitter thought. A man could lose an army here— Then, far inshore, a crimson bulb blinked out, came on again. Something moved up there. Someone had crossed between Sam and the light.

Sam waited, eyes on those dim lights. Ten seconds, twenty . . . and another bulb blinked, burned steadily again. Inboard! Sam thought. He's heading toward the keel! Sam went back the way he'd come, moving swiftly. When he could stand erect again, he ran.

Far up the way, the floodlight swung. Slowly, the blazing eye of it came around. Black shadows leaped and ran there beneath the ship, a crazy criss-crossing of crib and shoring. And another shadow lived in the second before the light was gone. It was the image of a man, black upon the deck, the hull. A colossus planted on wide-spread feet, giant arms swinging down, striking at a blurred and kneeling shape. . . .

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Sam Gallagher sought the walkway, cold sweat on his face. He picked up a splintered chunk of plank, the size of a baseball bat; he carried it as a club. He had gone but a little way toward the bow when a man appeared ahead of him in the reddish glow of the next light. A short man who wore a leather jacket, a rigger's belt.

Sam dropped the club.

"Mac!" he called softly.

McWhitty turned. He held a wadded cloth in one hand, his spud wrench in the other. His face was stiff and bloodless. He wet his lips before he spoke.

"He knew you."

"Yes," said Sam. "He did."

"That was close, man. Too damn' close!"

"Did he —"

He let the rest go, watching McWhitty's hands. Methodically, the man cleaned his wrench, wiping away the black stain that smeared the jaw of it. He went on rubbing, polishing long after the stain was gone.

"Look," Sam began.

"You better get back to your job."

McWhitty's voice was cool, matter-of-fact. He had a steady look for Sam. "I'll put in a call for Thane," he said. "We'll need him to cover this."

"Mac," said Sam, "I take it back."

"Are you nuts?" McWhitty asked.

"No," said Sam. "Not any more."

The spiking gun lay where he'd left it. Brownie knelt far down the deck, his back to the light. Sam looped the air hose over his shoulder and started along the line of spikes. The gun bucked and tore at his hands, but he

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did not mind for it hid the trembling that had him now. He wondered at McWhitty's icy calm, the deft speed with which the man had moved. After this, Sam told himself, I'll take the rabbits every time. They grow up to be lions when you need them — they really do!

Jeff came at daylight. He watched Sam for a time, and then, quietly, he said, "What happened to your neck?"

"I ran into a lumber pile in the dark."

"You manage to keep yourself in bruises," Jeff said. "You can dog it off here. I've got a new job for you and Brownie. The divers are moving in to build the out-board way for number eight. You two will rig for them."

"I don't know anything about divers."

Jeff grinned. "You'll learn," he said.

The back porch was a quiet place that afternoon. The garage cut off the wind; there was warmth in the pale, winter sun. Sam Gallagher sat on the bottom step. Paul was beside him there. Gretchen leaned against Sam's knee, tracing with one forefinger some design of her own on the cloth of Sam's trousers.

"What do divers do?" Paul asked.

"I'm not sure I know myself," Sam told him. "But roughly it goes like this: ships are built on land, and then slid down into the water. The divers build the launching apron — that's a kind of runway that goes 'way out on the river bottom. The ship slides down it, you see, and doesn't get stuck in the mud."

Gretchen said, "Why, Gallagher?"

"They think it's best, honey."

"You're a girl; this's for boys and men." Paul looked up at Sam, interest bright in his eyes. "Did you help the diver?"

"I did today."

"How?" said Paul.

"We stand on a raft. When the diver wants something we tie it on a rope and send it down to him."

"What do they look like?"

Sam looked down at his hands. "Like people. The diver's about my size. The tender's a big Swede. He's the man who handles the diver's lines and talks to him by telephone. He wears a gold bracelet on his wrist."

Gretchen said, "Why, Gallagher?"

"There you have me," he said.

Content, she went back to her endless tracing. Paul squirmed on the step. "What else happened?" he asked. Sam managed a grin for him.

"They brought the Chinook in today. She's a big floating crane. They use her for a dredge."

"Let's talk about divers."

"Well —" Sam began.

Jill McCann came out on the back porch then. She was smiling though her eyes were grave. "I hate to break up a party," she said, "but I just finished a batch of cookies. Chocolate cookies."

Paul's head came up. "May we have some?"

"Yes. They're on the table."

The screen door slammed behind the two children. Jill sat down on the step above Sam. Quietly she said, "Thane called. He said to tell you the Simms item has been arranged."

"Thanks," he said.

Jill said, "What happened, Sam?"

"Nothing, McCann. Nothing at all."

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"You're a poor liar, Sam. Your sense of humor slips when things go haywire. The bounce goes out of you."

"I'm tired, McCann. I —"

"Did you contact Simms?"

"In a way." Closing his eyes, he saw again the run of black shadow beneath the carrier's hull, the ugly stain darkening the jaw of McWhitty's spud wrench. "He knew me, McCann. We met long ago in Berlin. His name wasn't Simms then."

"Good Lord!" she whispered.

He told her how the meeting had been arranged, his voice grey and quiet. "The light was behind him," he said. "He saw my face before I saw his. He knew me, McCann." He made a fist of one brown hand. "So it had to be one of us. If he got to his people and talked, McWhitty and I were through. If I got to mine, then he was done."

Jill McCann's eyes were wide and round.

"He tried for me with a peevee and missed. He went over the trestle and down under the hull of the carrier on the next way. I lost him in the dark, but McWhitty was in the play. He's a good man, that McWhitty, in spite of what I've said. He does his job."

"Simms is — dead?"

"Yes," said Sam. "He is."

Silence fell between them for a time. Woodenly, he said, "I hadn't planned to tell you, but perhaps it's best. It had to be, McCann. It's always this way when these things break into the open."

"It's war."

"And a dirty, ugly mess," he said.

Her voice was husky. "What happens now?"

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"That's hard to say. Thane will cover for us as best he can. He'll put pressure in the right places and Simms' death will be written off as an accident. We hope the people he worked for believe the report."

"Suppose someone saw —"

She left it there, and he was quiet, remembering the slow swing of the floodlight. "No," he said finally, "I think we're in the clear. It was dark down there, too dark for anyone to see what was going on."

"I hope you're right, Sam."

"So do I," he said. And though he did not put it in words, this thought was in his mind: Tomorrow I'll know how right I am. Tomorrow, or the day after —

Jeff Gallagher was waiting in the pool of light outside the door of the tool-shack, when Sam Gallagher came out with his dinner-pail and top-maul. Jeff said, "Stick around a bit." Sam waited, out of the rain, while Jeff picked out Bevins, Calaban, Ikey, and Tom Brownell.

"That's the crew," Jeff said. "You'll need top-mauls. You, Calaban, bring a couple of wrenches. A nail-bar, Brownie. Sam, a couple of peevees. Bevins, a handsaw. Ikey can carry the lunches —"

Ikey said something, growling.

Bevins laughed in the darkness. "Take it easy, sonny," he said. "Uncle Jeff will let you carry tools when you grow up like the rest of the men."

"You know where you can go," Ikey said.

Jeff chuckled. "Take it easy, you two." He slanted a nod at the tool-shack. "Better get in out of the rain. I've got a little business to take care of before we shove off for the job."

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"Stay a long time," Bevins said.

Jeff went into the time office; the men bunched up under the eaves of the tool-shack to wait. Ikey moved close to Sam Gallagher. "Hey, Sam," he said softly, and there was a self-conscious grin on his small face, "tell me somethin', will yuh?"

"If I can," said Sam. "What's your trouble?"

"I been thinkin' since Bevins sounded off the other day. Not about the Union, but about the other. You know, the dough. The pay-check. Bevins said we don't get as much for our buck-fifty a hour as we used to get for our six-bits, an' he's right. How come, anyway?"

"Inflation," said Sam.

"That ain't no answer," said Ikey, troubled now. "At least for me, it ain't. I thought they put ceiling prices on stuff so we wouldn't have inflation. Yah, an' froze the rents so we wouldn't have it."

"So they did," Sam said.

"Then how come we got it?"

"Prices go up to meet the wage level," Sam said, and grinned a little. "Plenty of people swear they stay a little above the wage level. Wages went up when the war boom started; prices jumped about the same time. The boys in Washington slapped on the price ceilings to keep the inflation under control."

"But we got it?" Ikey persisted.

Sam nodded. "In a small way. You pay fifteen cents for a loaf of bread. Three years ago you got the same loaf of bread for a dime. So the price of bread's gone up to meet the high wage level; it's been blown up. Anything that's blown up is inflated."

"An' fifteen-cent bread's inflation?"

"That's right," said Sam.

"You get me," Ikey said. "So help me God, you get me. You an' the newspapers. You can take two plus two an' louse it up so a workin' stiff like me can't make head or tail of it. 'What's inflation?' I ask. An' you get me balled up with fifteen-cent bread." He paused, head bent in thought. "Let's rig her a little different. For me, a buck's a buck — yesterday, today, an' tomorrow. But these big shots, these guys that figure things out don't see her that way. How come?"

"In boom time money is easy," Sam replied. "In depression time it's tight. When you have easy money the purchasing power of the nation goes up. That's what has happened now. Due to the war effort, the stock pile of consumer goods has gone down. As time goes on the stock pile will get lower and lower. Then you have —"

"There you go again," said Ikey.

Sam Gallagher laughed. "I'll let you in on a secret, Ikey," he said. "When you're in doubt about anything, you can often appear learned and well-informed by simply stringing words together until you wear the other man out."

"Well," Ikey said, "I'm gettin' kinda tired."

"Let's try it this way, Ike. In the beginning a man didn't need money. He had a cave in a hill-side and a club. If he got hungry he went out and slugged something and dragged it home and ate it."

Ikey grinned. "An' if he wanted a woman he went out an' slugged him one and dragged her home. Man, they had somethin' in them days! There's a couple of gals in the front office here that I'd like to slug an' drag home. They'd be handy to have around. One of 'em —"

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"We're talking about money," Sam said.

Ikey sighed regretfully. "Keep 'er goin'."

"Things got complicated. Somebody built a house; somebody else planted a garden. Then it wasn't long until some guy wanted a house too big to build by himself, or the guy with the garden had to have help with the harvest. So one man went to work for another. The working man wanted to be paid, naturally. The farm hand probably got a split of the harvest, but the man who worked on the house couldn't haul home a stack of lumber for his pay."

"So they invented money," Ikey said.

"And that was a headache," Sam said. "They had to have some way to measure the value of it. So the guy with the house to build said: 'You boys give me a hand and I'll pay you. I'll give you a buck for every pint you sweat.'"

"Then a buck was worth a pint of sweat."

"Then there were a lot of guys with houses to build and not enough men to build them. So some wise guy said: 'I'll pay a buck for a half pint of sweat.' And the boys grabbed at it. Pretty quick everybody was paying a buck for a half pint of sweat. They had to get the men."

"I get that," Ikey said. "Keep goin'."

"That's what's happened now," Sam said. "We're working for half-pint of sweat dollars. Naturally, those dollars won't buy as much as the dollars that are worth a full pint."

"You're wrong about one thing, Sam. These bucks we get now ain't worth even a half-pint of sweat. A man gets one for jus' spittin' on his hands." He sighed again. "Me, I'd rather have the old days when a man had to get down

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an' grunt to earn a dollar. You really had somethin' then."

"That you did," said Sam.

"Here's Jeff," Ikey said, and grinned. "Let's you an' me go sweat a day's pay."

Jeff led the way through the yard. Past the plate shop, the assembly platforms. Men worked here under the blaze of lights, building keels — keels for ships that would take the place of ships still unfinished on the ways. There was noise, a bedlam of it, and in the blurring sounds you could feel the pace, the hurry, the ceaseless drive. Welders, chippers, lay-out men, riggers, burners, ship-fitters — one o'clock in the afternoon, four in the morning. The sign above them read:

THEY SANK THREE YESTERDAY!
HOW MANY CAN YOU BUILD TODAY?

There was a machine-shop further on, and Sam Gallagher saw a long line of machines — a man at each, a man working. He saw the huge dome of the loft building, aglow with light, the pipe shop beyond that. And further still, a long line of warehouses. At the outfitting dock he counted the ships. Fourteen. Twelve freighters, two fighting ships —

Calaban said, "A guy got bumped off yesterday, under the carrier next to the new way."

Sam made his voice casual. "Yes?"

"A chunk of cribbing come down on him."

"I ain't surprised," Bevins said. "I seen some of them cribs built. A fine mess o' carpenters they got here."

"Where're we headed for?" Brownie asked.

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Ikey said, "You got me, pal. But I swear to God I wear out a dollar's worth of caulks every time I walk through this circus."

"It's big," Sam agreed.

"A year ago," Calaban said, "they were herding goats all along this river front."

"Ever milk a goat, Ikey?" Bevins asked.

"Hell, yes!"

"How many teats they got?"

Ikey was a moment answering. Then, "Four."

Bevins whooped. "You milked a lot of goats!"

Jeff Gallagher took them to the conversion dock. There were two hulls tied up there. New hulls, with nothing above the deck line — no deck house, no bridge, no funnel. To Sam Gallagher, they seemed bigger than Liberty ships, their bows higher and cleaner lined. He wondered about them, then suddenly it clicked. Aircraft carriers! Built in some other yard and brought here for completion. For flight decks, superstructure, and all the rest.

Jeff said, "There're two more comin' in. We've got to build a thousand feet of dock to handle them."

"How long will that take?" Sam asked.

"Two years ago, six months. Now —" he lifted a hand, "they'll be here in six weeks. It's our job to have a place for them."

Seaboard's floating bucket-dredge, the Chinook, was moored under the bow of the downstream carrier hull. The Chinook was like the Woodland. "The way a Model-T's like a '42 Packard," Ikey said. "They're both cars."

The Chinook was built on a steel barge. Her boom was bigger than the Woodland's, longer. Her A-frame

was steel. Her spuds were twenty-four by twenty-four, big enough to hold her steady in any sort of digging.

Ahead of the Chinook lay a barge carrying a pile-driver. The driver was rigged-up and complete, just as she'd come off the Island job, down river.

"We'll have to take her apart," Jeff said. "Get the hammer out, the leads and the A-frame down. Put 'em up here on the dock. Bring the pot up next, then the gun'ales. Then we'll put her back together. Max wants her to be driving by noon."

He whistled at the Chinook. The operator put his head out the window. He wore a white cap, which seemed an odd thing at that time of night and that time of year. He had a grin for Jeff.

"Jeff, boy!" he yelled, "how's she goin'?"

"Just right, Toby."

"You got them dahlia bulbs yet?"

"You betcha — one each of all them kinds you saw last summer."

"Swell! The old lady's plannin' on 'em. It'd break her heart if I didn't bring 'em home."

"Tell her not to worry."

Jeff waved a hand at the piledriver.

"Can you handle her with a two-part line?"

Toby scratched his head.

"What the hell, Jeff — not the whole rig?"

"A piece at a time, you crackpot."

"Didn't you see Max?"

"Sure."

"He told me you were gonna fetch 'er up in one chunk. That's why I rigged a three an' two."

Now Jeff was puzzled. "He didn't say anything like

that to me." He swore. "We'd be taking a hell of a chance, Toby. I don't like it."

"What'll she weigh, Jeff?"

"The boiler, twelve to fifteen ton; the hammer, five. The rest of it maybe ten. I'll take the hammer out, anyway. That'd give you something like twenty-five tons."

"I laid concrete apron slabs down at the Naval Station up to thirty-five ton, with divers workin' under 'em all the time —"

Jeff Gallagher swore again. He looked at the Chinook's boom, at the piledriver, and back at the boom again. Sam could understand Jeff's problem. He had a known safety factor of about ten tons. He was weighing that against the need for haste. To bring the driver up in one piece would save four hours. To break the boom out of the Chinook would cost a great many hours and several thousand dollars.

"Times like these," Ikey whispered, "I'm glad I got no brains."

Sam said, "Two of us."

"Here's Max," Calaban said.

And it was Max Lessing. He strode toward them through the shadows of the carrier hulls. The night wind flapped his topcoat; he bent his head against the fine rain. Sam Gallagher looked at him, saw his tall shoulders, his confident, big-boned face, his white smile. Sam's jaw went tight. "The bastard!" he whispered, and no one heard it but himself.

"About ready to go?" Lessing asked.

Jeff said, "You want to lift her in one piece?"

"That's right."

"It's taking a chance."

"No," Max Lessing said, "the insurance company rated that boom at forty tons."

Jeff said, "I'd give it thirty."

"You'd still have a margin of safety."

"Not enough to risk equipment, or men."

"I'll take the responsibility for the equipment. You can keep the men out of the way."

Jeff was thoughtful, sober. "I can keep the men clear," he said finally. "I guess that's as far as my authority goes. I'll bring her up."

Max Lessing chuckled. "You worry too much, Jeff. The boom handled thirty-five tons two weeks ago. It can handle twenty-five now."

"It should," Jeff agreed.

Max Lessing strode away. Jeff turned to the men.

"Ikey, you and Sam rustle the chokers. Toby's got 'em aboard somewhere. Brownie, tear down the engineer's doghouse. I'll take Bevins and Calaban with me."

Sam Gallagher followed Ikey down the ladder to the Chinook. The moment Sam stepped on deck his feet went out from under him and he sat down hard. "Caulks don't hold much on this here steel," Ikey said. They cat-footed it into the Chinook's engine room.

She was a neat rig — polished and painted to the last small fitting. The boiler loomed big and clean to stern. The main winch lay amidships. The deck winches and spud lifts were fitted neatly against the port and starboard bulkheads. The burner's roar was pleasant and warm; and somewhere a bilge pump clicked contentedly to itself. A good rig, Sam thought.

Toby pointed out the chokers.

"Those thirty-footers."

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The chokers were lengths of inch-and-an-eighth steel cable with an eye spliced in either end. Sam and Ikey dragged four of them on deck. Toby came out with four shackles. He was a young man, Toby. Wide-shouldered, big-armed. He had the rough look a man gets after years in construction — the pleasantly rough look that means no offense, yet offers a fight, if a fight's what you're after.

Ikey asked him a sober question.

"Know anything about goats, Toby?"

"Not a hell of a lot."

"How many teats has one got?"

Toby frowned, thinking. "I'd say four, but it don't seem right. It must be six. Why?"

"Bevins is ribbin' me."

"I'm pretty sure it's six."

"I'll try it on 'im."

They dragged the chokers down on the barge. Here Calaban and Bevins had knocked the pin out of the hammer, freeing the rig's hammer line. Toby, in the control cab again, lowered the hook. Sam put one end of a choker on the hook; Ikey shackled the other end around the hammer. Jeff signaled, and Toby raised the hammer. The men unbolted a section at the foot of the leads. This gave them added space, and when Toby lowered the hammer again, they were able to push it clear. Toby picked up the line, swung his boom, and laid the hammer on the dock.

Jeff said, "There's five ton we won't have to worry about."

Bevins climbed up on the dock to unhook the hammer. From there, he yelled down at Ikey.

"Hey, sweetheart! — how many teats on a goat?"

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Ikey was ready. "Six!" he yelled back.

Bevins roared with laughter.

"Wrong again," Calaban said, grinning.

Ikey flushed. "Damn that guy!"

Jeff said, "Get the rest of the chokers on the hook, now. We've got a job to do."

He marked the gun'ales at the points where he wanted the chokers hooked. Just aft of the boilers and just for'ard of the head-haul yoke. The men shackled the chokers. Toby tightened the line.

"Hold that!" Jeff said.

He stood back to look at it.

The gun'ales were like sled runners. The four chokers — one on each end of each runner — would raise the driver the way two men would raise a sled, if you thought of their arms as chokers.

"How does she look?" Jeff asked the men.

Brownie said, "I never moved a whole rig before."

"Neither did I," Jeff said.

"Ain't them leads stickin' up there goin' to make her top-heavy?" Bevins asked. "She'll fall on her side, sure as hell."

"I don't think so," Jeff answered. "When you get a strain on the front chokers, they'll come up tight around the A-frame and hold her steady."

Ikey said, "Will a three-and-two pick'er?"

The three-and-two, Sam thought, would be the tackle Toby had rigged on the boom. There was a block with two pulleys hanging near the top end of the boom, and a block with three pulleys suspended in the lines.

"It'll do," Jeff said.

He turned to Sam. "Any ideas?"

Sam thought a moment. Then: "It seems to me you've got too much weight ahead of the front chokers. She'll want to tip forward."

Jeff looked narrow-eyed at the driver, comparing the weight of the leads with the weight of the boiler.

"You may be right," he said. "God himself couldn't tell till he took hold of her." He jerked his head. "Stand from under. We'll see what she says."

He signaled Toby with two hands lifted — the up-easy signal. Toby pulled a lever. The Chinook panted softly. The lines came tight, then rigid. Slowly, the stern of the driver came up. One foot, two, three. The forward end was moveless on the barge.

Jeff said, "Good boy, Sam."

Sam Gallagher felt fine. A pat on the back from Jeff — fancy that! A kick in the pants was more like it.

Jeff signaled and Toby eased the driver down. Ikey and Bevins moved the chokers ahead. Jeff signaled Toby to try again. The forward end came up first this time. Sam held his breath. A little more, and the after end lifted. The driver was clear of the barge then, and riding nicely. Jeff stopped it six feet above the deck.

"How'd she come?" he asked.

"Like pullin' your finger out of a lard bucket," Toby answered. "Half throttle. No load a'tall."

"Sure," Jeff said. "Put a few more blocks in that line an' you could lift her with a hand crank. But the weight's still there. Twenty-five tons of it."

"I ain't sweatin' much," Toby said.

"You're so stinkin' proud of that rig," Jeff told him, "you'd try to pull the devil out of hell."

Cheerfully, Toby said, "What'll he weigh?"

"Put her down!" Jeff said.

The driver on the barge again, Jeff turned to the men. "We won't let Toby swing the boom — any kind of a sudden jerk might spill the works. We'll run a deck line from the stern of the Chinook to an anchor in the river. We'll drop the port-bow spud. Then, when we tighten the deck-line, the Chinook will swing around her spud like a blonde goes around a Maypole."

Bevins and Brownie got the Chinook's skiff. They loaded an anchor and coiled down a hundred yards of line. Bevins rowed and Brownie paid out the line.

The men waited, and while they were waiting, Ikey came over to Sam Gallagher. Seriously, he said. "Maybe you know somethin' about goats?"

"I owned one when I was a kid," said Sam.

"For God's sake — an' you didn't tell me."

"You didn't ask, Ikey."

"How many teats did it have?"

"One," Sam answered.

"Is that a fact!" Ikey grinned happily. "Lemme at that Bevins skut!"

He was standing on a fender pile, when Bevins and Brownie rowed ashore. He yelled down at the boat.

"Bevins, boy! — how many teats on a goat?"

Bevins laughed. "Tell me, Ikey — you milked 'em."

"Sure. An' I knew all the time."

"How many?"

"One!"

Bevins stared at Ikey, open-mouthed. "One!" he gasped. He almost fell out of the boat. "Ikey!" he roared. "You milked a billy-goat!"

Incredulously, Ikey turned on Sam Gallagher.

Sam nodded. "He had horns; he pulled a wagon."

Ikey's face puckered.

"The world's fulla bastards —"

Jeff had Toby drop the port-bow spud. The spud was a timber two feet square and fifty feet long, held vertical by steel guides. Dropped and buried in the bottom mud, it firmed the left-front corner of the Chinook, while the rest was free to pivot around it.

"Tighten the deck-line," Jeff ordered.

Toby did that. The Chinook swung until the mooring line that held her stern to the dock came tight.

"Hold it!" Jeff said.

He turned to Ikey. "You and Calaban rig a snub line. You'll want a long one so you can stop her when she comes around in place. Stop 'er easy, mind! No jerks." He waved his hand. "The rest of you, get the hell out of the way."

Sam found a place in the bow of the Chinook.

"What about you?" he asked Jeff.

"I'm all right," Jeff answered.

He stood on the off-shore edge of the barge. From there he could see the piledriver, the way it lifted. He could see Toby in the control cab, Ikey and Calaban at the snub-line. It was the only place for him, but Sam Gallagher did not like it. He thought of Max Lessing. He thought of the cut wire on the piling car. "Damn it!" he said. And there was sweat on his face, on the palms of his hands.

"Up she goes!" Jeff called.

He lifted both hands. Sam heard the Chinook's engine pant, felt her bow go down as the weight came on her boom. The piledriver rocked a little, lifted. Jeff kept his

hands raised; the driver went smoothly into the air — five feet, ten, fifteen.

Tons meant little to Sam Gallagher, he thought in terms of size. The driver was eighty feet from end to end — half a block long. The boiler and the winch would just fit in his garage. The leads were a hundred feet high, or twice as high as the average telephone pole. Seeing it there, suspended in the cables, stark and ugly in the glare of the lights, Sam Gallagher thought it was an almighty big load for any crane.

Jeff took it up twenty-five feet. That would be above the roof of Sam's house. Jeff stopped it there. He looked at it. There was no unease in his slim figure — a cool, deliberate concentration, no more. He waited until the driver had stopped its faint swinging.

"Deck-line!" he called.

His eyes never left the driver.

The Chinook panted. The hull trembled under Sam Gallagher's feet, swung a little.

"Snub-line!"

The Chinook swung more. The driver moved toward the dock, and the motion set up a pendulum swing.

Jeff's voice snapped whip-like. "Hold that!"

They waited, unbreathing, until the swing stopped.

"Deck-line!" Jeff called again.

The Chinook inched around her spud.

"Snub-line!"

Her stern drifted toward mid-river. A foot at a time. When the faintest swing touched the driver, Jeff's sharp "Hold that!" stopped the turning. Close work. Careful work. Like climbing a very high cliff. All eyes were on the driver, breathlessly there.

P I L E B U C K

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No one saw the tugboat, no one heard it.

Out early, slamming blithely down river for the day's first load, she was suddenly abreast the Chinook. Ikey's frightened squawk was the first Sam knew of it. He saw her, then, her bow buried in foam, her screw kicking. The wave she left was big and high. It curled smashing against the carrier's bow, slid under the stern of the Chinook. The stern heaved up to the crest, came down in the trough, and heaved again.

The sudden movement shot through the Chinook. The bow sagged, lifted. The boom swooped down and up in a crazy, swinging arc. The driver lurched. The boom was a solid timber. Three feet through at the butt, it tapered to half that at the tip, with a length of over ninety feet. It should have been as rigid as a bar of steel. Now it began to bend. It arched in the center, as a bow arches to the pull of the bow cord.

And a terrifying sense of disaster caught Sam Gallagher. His breath was gone. His mind was shrilling, "It can't happen . . . it can't!" He was sick with it, there in the dark and the rain, desperately helpless, pounding the cold steel of the clam-shell bucket with his naked fist. "Watch it!" The voice was his own, tearing from a throat drawn tight, and lost in the deafening crack of the breaking boom. The top end went skyward, the butt crashed down on the deck of the Chinook. Now the whole great weight of the driver was loose. Twenty-five tons, hundreds of feet of steel and timber, thundering down on the barge. It struck across the barge and lay there, shuddering and intact.

There was a long moment of pause. A moment long enough for quick relief to flood through Sam Gallagher.

P I L E B U C K

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For him to think fleetingly, "It's over. Over . . . and no one's hurt!" Then, like an ugly after-thought, the top end of the boom came down — several tons of boom, of head-block, of rigging — and crashed across the boiler. The driver came apart. Not explosively — bit by bit, a piece at a time — a wreck sustained, the methodical work of an angry God with plenty of time and a fine flair for devastation.

The gun'ales snapped off ahead of the winch. The winch and the boiler spilled into the river, a torn mass of cable and steel. Across the barge, the gun'ales broke again. The leads shot to the river bottom, thirty feet below, stopped there. Falling, the A-frame jerked free of the king-pin, smashed down and broke into the river. The leads toppled, then, the seventy feet of them still above the water, fell slowly, majestically.

"Jeff!" Sam yelled. "Watch it!"

Jeff Gallagher saw the leads coming. He watched them come. There was no panic in his slim figure. He half-crouched. The space he had was no more than enough. Knowing where the leads would strike, he would use that space wisely, throwing himself to the clear. The leads came against the edge of the barge, sheared. It looked, then, as if they would miss the barge. And they did, sliding toward mid-river. But there were the cables — the pile-line and the hammer-line — strung from the top of the leads to the broken winch. Neither Sam nor Jeff saw them whipping through the darkness.

The hammer-line caught Jeff across the hips and slammed him down on the deck of the barge. He fell on his side, rolling. The pile-line caught his legs and doubled them. Far out in the river, the top of the leads came

down, drawing the cables tight. Jeff Gallagher was tossed in the air, snapped down into the water. He vanished under the whip-lashed foam where the cables struck.

Sam Gallagher's foot touched the deck-edge. He launched himself in a flat, racing dive. A yell was in his ears. He glimpsed the white streak of Bevins' clean body hurtling off the dock. The water caught him. He went into it, under it, swimming hard through the black and the cold.

He wanted this dive to carry him to Jeff. He tried hard to make it last, but the drag of his clothes stopped him, drove him up. The river was smooth — smooth everywhere. Jeff might be here, or there, or there. Bevins swam out, dived and came up, dived again. Sam Gallagher yelled at the barge.

A rope snaked out from Brownie's hand. Sam caught it. "In . . ." he yelled. He was out of his coat before he reached the barge, half out of his pants as they pulled him up. The boots came off, Ikey tore them off, and his shirt. Ikey's face was twisted. Crying, Sam thought. On his feet again, at the barge edge, he traced the cables from the broken winch. He lined them against the top of the leads floating in the river.

"Get a boat," he said.

"Comin'." Brownie's voice was cool. "A doctor, and an ambulance."

Sam dove again.

This time his body went smoothly down. He kept going down until the rough shape of the cable cut him across the chest. He caught on, followed it with a rapid hand-over-hand. The pressure hurt his ears, stung his nostrils, and he cursed the river, cursed the blackness

of it, the unrelenting cold. He clung to the cable until he could go no further. His lungs wanted air, his throat jumped with that want. His mouth would open in spite of him.

It was time to let his breath go, and he let it go, blowing hard. The work was easier then. He stayed down with less trouble. "Left hand . . . right hand . . . left hand . . . right hand. . . ." His lungs stopped their hurting, his head quit its steady pound. He felt oddly comfortable. A thought was in his mind, faint and strange. "Mom'll wallop you, Jeff, boy. If she ever finds out —"

The bundle of clothes was Jeff.

Jeff, loosely tangled in cable, floating easily on his back. Lazily. His arms were out and relaxed, head tipped, hair free in the water. Sam got an arm around him, pulled, and Jeff came free. Holding Jeff, Sam looked up. There was light up there. Funny. Maybe day had come. He went that way. No hurry now. . . . He kicked his feet. Part way up he decided to rest a bit. Sort of relax — take it easy — drift — No! Better not. Another kick or two. Then rest —

He broke the surface. The light was blinding, bright. A sudden rough hand caught his hair, pulled his head back. Bevins' voice bellowed in his ear. A tugboat motor clicked and hummed, and the smooth shape of a tugboat slid up behind the light. More hands, rougher still, caught Sam, heaved him up on deck. Jeff was dropped beside him.

"Easy, there!" a voice said. "This'n's got a busted leg —"

A hand caught Sam's face, turned it to the light.

Bevins said, "Sam's okay — get blankets on 'im!"

P I L E B U C K

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“Jeff’s out!”

“I’ll take him,” Bevins said sharply. “Let’s see his tongue. Okay, belly down — and watch that leg. One — two — three — four — five. Get that count! You’ll have to spell me. Snap your hands when you let go. One — two — three — four — five —”

Jeff had a broken leg.

Tough, Sam thought. Tough on Jeff —

CHAPTER FIVE

SAM GALLAGHER stood on the dock-edge and watched the ambulance move smoothly away. He shivered, pulling tighter the blanket thrown across his naked shoulders. His pants were wet; the stiff cloth like ice against his skin. His bare feet were thrust into unlaced boots.

Ikey said, "Jeff'll be okay."

He was standing with Bevins, Calaban, and Brownie, perhaps a dozen feet away. Strain had marked his small face. He rubbed his lips and left a grease smear there.

"The doc said it was just his leg."

Bevins said, "An' maybe some ribs."

"I know," said Sam, "I heard him."

Turning, he looked down at the wreckage strewn barge, at the deck of the Chinook. Tom Brownell came to Sam's side. "Safety Inspectors," he said quietly, and nodded at the men clustered around the jagged stump of the Chinook's boom. "Huntin' for answers that ain't goin' to help much."

Sam said, "The tug did it. The bow wave—"

"Maybe." Brownie's voice was placid, slow; but his eyes had the shine of thought. "I seen a boom or two bust, in my time. Wasn't any of 'em went the way that one did. It makes a man wonder."

"Let's go down and have a look."

Brownie shook his head. "The Inspectors'd run us off there. An' plenty fast. This's their baby now."

"My shirt and jacket are on the barge."

"You can try," Brownie said.

P I L E B U C K

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Sam Gallagher went down the ladder, the blanket flapping around his shoulders. He dropped on the steel deck of the Chinook and picked a careful way toward the tight group at the base of the splintered boom. Toby, the Chinook's operator, was there, hemmed in by a couple of Inspectors, a uniformed guard, and a thick-set man who was obviously an official of some sort.

"—knew?" Toby was saying. "Sure! Why wouldn' I know?" There was outraged anger in his rough voice, in the blunt thrust of his chin. "I run the Chinook from the day she was built. I ought to know what she'd do, an' what she'd lift!"

"Not so loud," the Inspector said.

And Toby growled, "To hell with you!"

"I can have you fired. I —" The Inspector gave it up then. He was a round, small man, somehow soft and rabbit-like. His eyes were haggard behind thick glasses.

The Guard said, "I can take him to the office."

Toby set his jaw. "Want to bet on that?"

"Please." The Inspector tried again. "We're not accusing you of anything. We're only trying to get to the bottom of this. The boom —"

"Was fixed to bust," Toby said.

The Inspector said, "Who had access —"

"Wait," the thickset man said, "we've got company." He slanted his head to look at Sam; his face tough but not unfriendly. "Who're you, son?"

"I'm a pilebuck," said Sam.

"With that blanket, you look like an Indian buck."

"I came after my clothes," said Sam.

"Get 'em," the Guard said, "an' run along."

Sam Gallagher went past them to reach the barge.

He found his shirt and jacket in a sodden heap there. He bent to pick them up and a bit of wooden rod caught his eye. Perhaps a foot in length, it was a little more than an inch in diameter. Clinging to one end, was a gray substance that crumbled under Sam's touch.

Putty, he thought. Now why —

"I'll take that," a voice said.

The thickset man was standing close-by. His face was no longer friendly.

"Sure," said Sam, "I just thought —"

"We'll do the thinking, son. Run along."

Brownie was waiting at the ladder-head, when Sam climbed back to the dock. "I talked to Kelly," he said. "He says for you and Bevins to call it a day." He smiled. "They didn't seem to like you much down there."

"No," said Sam, "they didn't."

The restaurant was not far from the main gate. It was small and crowded. A couple of welders stuffed the juke-box with nickels. Sam Gallagher squeezed past them to the phone booth. The brassy thump and pound of swing music came plainly through the walls.

"Yes?" It was Thane's quiet voice.

"The Chinook was wrecked today."

"How?" said Thane. "And why?"

Sam Gallagher described the accident. While he talked he thought of Thane, small, deft, and unhurried. He'd be taking notes in shorthand now, sitting at a desk bare save for the telephone and a block of ruled paper. There'd be interest in his face, nothing more.

"How was it arranged?" Thane asked.

"Someone drilled holes in the boom and then plugged

them with wooden rod and putty. The Chinook rolled when the tug's bow wave hit her; the strain was enough to snap the boom."

"What do they gain by this?"

"Delay," said Sam. "The driver's on the bottom of the river. Junk. The Chinook's a mess. There are two carrier hulls due in soon. Now there'll be no dock space for them. The Chinook must be repaired, and Seaboard will have to find or build another driver. The cost in man-hours will be large."

"Because a few holes were drilled?"

"That's right."

"The opposition is efficient," said Thane dryly.

"Yes," said Sam. "And damn them for that!"

A square of cardboard was tacked to the tool-house door the next morning. Printed on it were the words: "SEE KELLY BEFORE WORK!" Sam Gallagher was looking at this, frowning, when Ikey pushed through the crowd to his side.

"What's this?" Sam asked.

"Speech," said Ikey. "Kelly's pushin' in Jeff's place till they get Swede off the Island job. He's got to make a speech, he says. Orders from the office." Ikey grinned. "It oughta be good."

Sam chuckled. "Kelly's growing up."

"But he ain't likin' it. How's Jeff?"

"Pretty good," said Sam. "They've got his leg in a traction splint. His ribs are taped. He should be out of the hospital in two or three weeks."

Soberly, Ikey said, "Good job he had you around."

Sam held out his arm. "Want to feel my muscle?"

P I L E B U C K

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"Aw!" said Ikey. "How's for you to go to hell!"

Kelly made his speech from a pile of stringers.

"Hey, you men. Listen here a minute!"

He reminded Sam of a half-trained performing bear — a sincere bear, making an honest-to-God effort to do as he'd been taught. The wind had pushed Kelly's hair around until it fit his head like a small, red haystack. He was self-conscious, ill at ease. The bend at the knees of his tin pants made you think he was about to jump — straight up, or at least off the pile of stringers.

"Somebody," he yelled at them, "is spreadin' bull around this here yard. I ain't namin' names. You all been doin' it! A guy comes to me an' he says, 'I hear somebody cut the wires on the pile car?' Another guy says, 'Did you know they was holes bored in Toby's boom?' " He scowled fiercely. "It's bull! An' so help me, you're all stuffed with it like a mess o' Christmas turkeys!"

He paused for breath, then bellowed. "You ought to see what's goin' on! They're tryin' to get you jumpy! First thing you know, you'll be lookin' at your pardner — a guy you worked with maybe ten years — and all of a sudden you'll think: Jesus! Maybe he's the guy that bored them holes. So you start watchin' him. He sees you actin' screwy, so he starts watchin' you. Then what've you got? Hell to pay, an' no foolin'!"

He spat on his hands. "So here's how she is. I'm runnin' this show till Jeff gets back, or Swede gets here. You're gonna do like I tell you. An' I'm tellin' you this: No more o' this stuff! The first guy that peddles it gets a time-check — that's orders from the office. And when he gets it, I'm personally gonna whale the hell out of him. That ain't from the office. That's from Kelly!"

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He got down and the speech was over.

Sam Gallagher and Brownie worked with the diver again that morning. It was lunch time before Brownie had anything to say. Then he looked up at Sam, his brown eyes thoughtful.

"How'd you like Kelly's speech?"

Sam said, "I'll go along with him."

Brownie rubbed the bowl of his pipe with a careful thumb. "Yes," he said. "We should, even though we know about the holes."

Sam grinned. "Careful. That Kelly can hit."

Brownie nodded soberly. "I'll shut my mouth."

It was quitting time when Max Lessing appeared. He stood at the water's edge, tall in well-cut gray, when Sam and Brownie rowed ashore. There were others with him — the thickset chap who'd been on the Chinook, and a thin man whose worried eyes had no part of his constant smile. Out of habit, Sam Gallagher noted their faces, filing them against a time of need.

Max Lessing said, "Are you Gallagher?"

"Yes."

"A nice job you did for Jeff."

"I wouldn't call it that."

The thickset man said, "Modest, huh?"

"No," said Sam. "But I swim pretty well."

The thickset man grunted and turned away, chin buried in the collar of his top-coat. Max Lessing smiled. "We'd like to talk to you about that," he said. "About the accident, too. Can you be in the office this afternoon?"

"Sure," said Sam.

The thin man murmured something in soft protest, and

annoyance came into Lessing's face. "Wait a minute," he said. "I've got to be on the Island this afternoon. How about coming out to the house tonight?"

"If that's what you want."

"Fine." Lessing hunched his shoulders against the wind. "Come for dinner. About eight." His smile widened. "And bring your wife."

"I'll do that," said Sam.

He watched Lessing, and the others move off up the shipway. Brownie made a slow task of lighting his pipe. "Well," he said, "you're getting up in the world."

Sam grinned. "It's my girlish figure."

The wind had strengthened with the dusk. Noisy and boisterous now, it rattled the shrubs and pelted the windows with rain. Sam Gallagher rubbed his high-ball glass against his cheek, watching the ruddy play of the fire-place blaze. He heard Jill McCann come slowly down the stairs, but did not turn his head.

"It took you an hour," he said lazily. "A man could have bathed, shaved, dressed, and grown a new beard in an hour."

"I read to the children."

"The model mother," he said.

He rolled his head to look at her, then whistled appreciatively. Jill's suit was simply tailored of soft, dusty brown. Her blouse was white, open at the throat. Her hat was jaunty, small. She was, quite suddenly, a person he had never seen before — lovely and completely feminine. Sam grinned at her, thinking: That outfit needs an orchid, a green orchid, flecked with yellow. No. Violets would be better.

"Do I look all right?" she asked.

"But good," he said. "You did a job on McCann to-night. Hold still and I'll make a pass at you."

"Don't bother." Color touched her cheeks; her eyes were troubled. "Sam, what about the children?"

"They're asleep, aren't they?"

"We can't go off and leave them."

"Why not? They never wake up."

"They might. They—" Jill McCann bent her head. "You'll have to go on alone, Sam. I'm staying here."

He looked at the mantel clock, the wry smile on his lips. He said, "Well, now —" and peered into his empty glass. After a time there was motor sound in the street; brakes squealed there. Jill McCann's eyes came up, dark and questioning.

"It was a gag," he said, smiling. "I got someone to stay with the kids. A nice, grandmotherly old soul."

"A stranger?" Jill breathed. "We can't —"

The doorbell rang. Sam Gallagher went into the entrance hall. She heard him murmur a low-voiced greeting; heard the door close. She turned as James Thane came through the archway — a dapper and sober Thane, who carried a neat bowler hat in one hand, a stick in the other.

"McCann," said Sam, "here's Gran'mammy."

Thane's brows went up. "What's this?"

"A joke of Sam's," said Jill. "And very bad."

"Most of his jokes are." Thane placed his hat and stick upon the table. Dryly, he asked, "Now about this Lessing thing? Why did he ask you to his house, Sam?"

"To talk about the accident."

"That makes little sense," said Thane.

PILEBUCK

II

"Maybe it does." Sam Gallagher put a cigarette between his lips. "Lessing doesn't need to be told about the accident. He knows all about it: the name of the man who did the job. How much he was paid. Everything. So it has to be something else. Lessing's suspicious. He wants information. All right. He needs a reason for asking a pilebuck to come calling. He's using the accident as a smoke screen."

"Why should he be suspicious?" Thane asked.

Sam Gallagher shrugged. "I wouldn't know."

"Simms!" Jill whispered. "Suppose someone saw —"

Thane frowned, concern in his eyes. "Imagination is not to be trusted in this work, my dear. One creates monsters, and then lives in fear of them." He turned to Sam. "This seems to call for a certain delicacy of handling. I suggest great care."

Sam grinned. "You're as bad as McCann."

"Perhaps," said Thane dryly. "But there's a reckless streak in you, Sam. I'm not going to enjoy waiting for your return."

"We'll hurry home," Sam promised.

A cab took them east, across the city and into the hills. Here the homes were large and new; here the house numbers were painted on the curb. "Brace yourself," Sam Gallagher told Jill McCann, as they went up the walk. "This can be damned important."

"Please!" she whispered. "Be careful."

He had time to grin at her, time to squeeze her arm and say, "Cautious Gallagher, they call me. . ." Then the door had opened in answer to his ring. Max Lessing smiled at them.

"The Gallaghers," he said. "Come in."

P I L E B U C K

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His heartiness woke memory in Jill McCann. *Won't you come into my parlor?* she thought. Then, briefly, she wondered what she had expected Max Lessing to be — small and dark and suave, perhaps, with clever eyes. The things he'd done somehow fit that description. But he was big, though you did not realize that until he stood beside Sam Gallagher in the hall. He had a rough, deep laugh, and an almost boyish way of throwing back the shaggy lock of blond hair that fell stubbornly in his eyes.

"A drink first," he said. "Then food."

Sam grinned. "Why bother eating?"

There were others in the living room: the two men who'd been with Lessing earlier in the day, and a tall woman, comfortably middle-aged and gracious.

"This's Anna," Max Lessing said. "My wife."

The thin man whose lips twitched constantly in a nervous smile was O'Day, an expediting engineer. "Glad to see you again," he said. "Very glad." Then the thick-set man took Sam's hand in a crushing grip. "My name is Royal," he said, "Ben Royal. And that was a damn' fine job you did for Jeff, the other morning."

"All luck," said Sam.

He tried for lightness and missed. Jill watched a red flush of embarrassment darken his face.

"What's this about?" she asked.

"You don't know?" A smile broke the tough cast of Ben Royal's face. "This guy —" he prodded Sam's chest with a thumb "— this husband of yours, is a hero."

"Pint-size," said Sam. "Last year's model."

"Not in my book," said Royal. "Mrs. Gallagher, he went into the river after Jeff. Into water blacker than

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you can imagine, and twice as cold. And he found Jeff tangled in the cables. He brought —”

Sam said, “I’m good in the dark. Ask any gal.”

Max Lessing said, “Here’s that drink.”

“A midget,” said Sam, “but welcome.”

And something in his voice, in the slant of his smile, made Jill remember Thane’s “There’s a reckless streak in you, Sam —”

Jill found herself beside Ben Royal at the dinner table. For a time the talk veered to the dim-out, gasoline rationing, the labor shortage. Then Max Lessing leaned forward, the candle-shine mirrored in his eyes.

“I saw Jeff today,” he said. “They’ve got him trussed up in a thousand dollars worth of rigging, but the doctors say he’ll be out of the hospital soon.”

Ben Royal said, “Good. We need Jeff.”

“He’s one of the best men we have.” Lessing sent a long glance at Sam. “We may as well get down to it,” he said. “What do you think about the accident?”

“It was no accident,” said Sam.

O’Day’s mouth jerked suddenly; his fork clattered on his plate. “What gave you that crazy idea, Gallagher?”

“I saw the boom break.”

Lessing said, “Go on.”

“The boom was weakened. The wire on that car of piling was cut.” Sam Gallagher leaned back in his chair. “The total is sabotage and murder.”

And tension was born in the room. There was an ugly tightening at the corners of Lessing’s eyes; O’Day’s head came around in a slow, stiff turn. At the table’s end, Anna Lessing’s face had a white and frozen look; her lips fumbled with an uncertain smile. Jill pressed her hands

palm-down on the table-cloth. For a crazy instant she felt as if Sam Gallagher had somehow made a roller-coaster car of the table, that all of them were jolting upward to the first, huge drop —

"You're a blunt monkey," Royal growled.

"So I am," said Sam Gallagher, and smiled. "But you don't want to talk about accidents. There've been none. You all know that. It follows, then, that I'm getting the business, in spades. The run-around. You had a reason for asking me here. Let's have at it, gentlemen. Let's haul this thing out in the open."

Lessing said, "Why so sure it's sabotage?"

"I've seen it many times, in many places. The pattern never varies. Guards rain down on an apparent accident. The men are chased away. Someone makes a speech." Sam Gallagher grinned. "Kelly did well with that, by the way. He was very good."

"Is all this common talk in the yard?"

"Yes. When Kelly's out of earshot."

"There!" said Royal. "I told you, Max."

"Yes. You told me." Max Lessing's frown deepened. "Gallagher, here's the truth of it: you work with the men. You're in a position to know what they think and what they say. I asked you here to tell us that."

"And I have," said Sam. "So now —"

Lessing said, "We must stop this talk. Production has fallen off sharply."

"Thirty per cent," said O'Day.

Lessing gave Sam a tight smile. "I think we can do something about that, with your help. You were on the dock when Jeff and I tangled. I wanted the driver lifted in one piece. Jeff disagreed. I felt the boom could easily

handle the driver. The insurance company rated that boom at forty tons."

Sam said, "They didn't know about the holes."

Lessing's mouth twitched. "Wait," he said. "That boom had been used to lift heavy concrete slabs. Each of those slabs weighed thirty-five tons; each put a tremendous strain on the boom. Naturally, this weakened the boom over a period of months. Men and machines have one thing in common: they weaken with time. For example, you couldn't lift as much at the end of a day as you could in the morning. Wood and metal are also victims of fatigue." He spread his hands. "So I was wrong. I forgot that very important point. The Chinook's boom was rated at forty tons. Actually, it was capable of lifting far less."

"That's neat," said Ben Royal. "Damn' neat."

"It's reasonable," said Lessing.

Sam Gallagher said, "And I'm to spread this bit of fiction through the yard. Is that the idea, gentlemen?"

"Exactly," Max Lessing said.

"What if there's another — accident?"

Ben Royal's head came up, candlelight flickering on the tough planes of his face. "There won't be," he said harshly. "It's my job to see there isn't. I won't give you details, and I won't name names. But there'll be no more trouble, Gallagher. You can bet on it!"

"I hope you're right," said Sam.

Lessing said, "About the other? Will you —"

"I'll spread the yarn," said Sam. "Why not?"

There was quiet for a time. Max Lessing made a careful task of clipping a long cigar; O'Day worried his cigarette, shredding it with nervous fingers. Ben Royal

propped his chin in cupped hands and stared thoughtfully at Sam Gallagher.

"You're not a pilebuck," he said finally. "You don't dress like one, or talk like one. I'd say you'd had some good jobs in your time."

"I have."

"You were a reporter, weren't you?" Lessing inspected the glowing tip of his cigar. "Seems I remember Jeff or Lea saying you'd been a foreign correspondent."

"I was," said Sam.

"Where'd you work?" Royal asked.

"Wherever I was sent."

"Germany?" Royal asked softly.

"Yes," said Sam. "In '36 and '37."

Jill McCann's hands tightened in her lap. She heard Royal's voice go on, insistent and prodding; heard Sam's pleasant reply. O'Day leaned forward, nervousness gone, his mouth holding the shape of a hungry smile. A savage look passed between Royal and Lessing. And Jill McCann's nails bit deep into her palms. There'd been something labored and unreal about the talk of sabotage and accident, but this — *They planned it!* she thought, troubled and afraid. *This is why we're here!*

"Ever see this Hitler guy?" Royal asked.

Sam Gallagher smiled. "Yes. The last time was at the *Sportspalast*, just after he'd gathered Austria into the fold. Arthur Seyss-Inquart, the man who'd helped swing that, was there to get a medal. He was shorter than Hitler, thin-lipped, swarthy. He wore glasses. I think Judas must have looked like Seyss-Inquart. They had a lot in common."

Royal said, "Why'd you leave in '37?"

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"The *Geheime Staats Polizei* didn't like me."

O'Day said, "The *Geheime* — what?"

"The Home State Police," said Sam. "The Gestapo."

Max Lessing said, "I hear they're tough."

"They're that." Sam Gallagher's lips had a wry slant now. "Fear is the compelling urge with those boys. They're brutal and damned thorough; they've got to be to last. The Gestapo have a neat system. They trust no one. They give a man a job. Then they assign a man to watch him. So you know, if you work for them, that everything you do is reported. You know if you make one mistake you've used up your luck. They've a way of — taking care of people who make mistakes."

"That'd work," said O'Day, "— in Germany."

Sam Gallagher looked at the man, laughter in his eyes. "It worked in Poland, too. In France. In Holland. And I'll give odds it's working now, wherever the Fifth Column boys are spotted: in motor plants, here and in Britain, in plane plants, shipyards, foundries."

Max Lessing said, "You sound very sure."

He looked at his watch then. "It's getting late," he said. "I'm afraid we'll have to run. The lead-off shift rolls around pretty early."

"I've some fair brandy," Lessing said.

"Thanks. Some other time."

Little was said during the wait for the cab. Max Lessing went to the door with them. He helped Jill with her coat; he took Sam's hand in a brief, hard grip. "It was nice having you," he said. "It's not often we can talk to a man who had a ringside seat when this mess started. When Germany marched on Poland —"

"That was after I left," Sam Gallagher said. "The

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Geheime Staats Polizei chased me out of Germany in 1937."

"I'd forgotten. You did tell us that."

"Yes. And I'll do what I can on the other. I'll tell the boys you guessed wrong about the Chinook's boom."

"Thank you," Lessing said. "And good night."

Not until they were in the cab, not until they were well away from Max Lessing's house, did Jill McCann venture to speak. "I'm glad that's over," she said then, relief in her voice. "I thought we'd never get out of there."

He chuckled. "McCann, you're wonderful!"

"What's there to laugh about?" she asked.

"They went for it, McCann. We've got 'em!"

"Yes — like the bear caught the bear trap."

She turned to look at him. The cab was slamming down a boulevard now; she could see his face in the glow of passing headlights. "Smug is the word for you," she said. "You look like you're ready to purr."

"Purrrrrr," he said.

She touched his arm, frowning. "But nothing was said, Sam. Lessing didn't —"

"That does it." His grin widened. "Now I know woman's place is in the home. I dangled the bait for Lessing. He took it — hook, line, pole and rowboat."

"You're crazy!"

"Want to bet?" he asked.

And he laughed at her again. Puzzled, she leaned back against the seat. The look of utter contentment was still on his face. He was pleased and proud. That meant something. He'd fought his way to the river bottom to find Jeff caught in a tangled web of cable . . . and hadn't

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bothered to mention it. So this was big and important. Jill smiled softly. This Gallagher was quite a lad.

"It was a smooth bit of business," he said. "As sweet as a lover's kiss." His grin shone in his eyes. "And speaking of kisses —"

She said, "Gallagher! Get away from me!"

A shaded lamp threw a wide pool of light over the deep chair near the fireplace. James Thane was there, small and quiet. He had been reading. Now he closed the book and put it aside. He had a smile and a nod for Jill McCann, a cool, measuring glance for Sam Gallagher.

"You've been up to something," he said.

Sam Gallagher said, "I did us a job."

"Give me facts," said Thane. "Details."

"Lessing is suspicious. He staged the dinner to find out where I'd come from, and why I was in the yard. He had a couple of stooges in to help."

"Stooges?"

"O'Day and Ben Royal. Know them?"

"Perhaps," said Thane. "Go on."

"They were very cute. They talked a lot but they didn't say much until I told them the Chinook's boom had been sabotaged. That was a word they didn't like. They squirmed. Finally, Lessing came up with a story about material fatigue — counter propaganda — and asked me to spread it through the yard. Then they got around to me."

James Thane said, "Yes?"

"I threw the *Geheime Staats Polizei* at them. The old 'little fleas have lesser fleas' business. I told them the

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Gestapo watched every man on their pay-roll. But good! I said I'd been run out of Germany in '37. Then I said I'd seen Hitler and Arthur Seyss-Inquart together — after Seyss-Inquart sold Austria down the river."

"That was in '38," Thane said. "In March."

Sam Gallagher grinned. "Of course."

"So you lied, obviously and badly. Why?"

"So Lessing would pick it up," said Sam. "And he did. He checked the date just as we were leaving." Sam Gallagher laughed. "Now the guy is over a barrel."

Dryly, Thane said, "I fail to see it."

Sam Gallagher's smile went out. His mouth jerked, turning down. "I'll make it simple," he said. "I'll go back to the beginning: Lessing had ideas about me. He'd decided I wasn't in the yard to learn pilebucking. Knowing that, you don't need a blueprint to see what would happen next."

"Your insurance rate goes up," said Thane.

Harshly, Sam said, "The way it stood, I was due for an accident — a peevee, a spud wrench, a chunk of cribbing. And I was no good to you. They'd be damned sure I didn't see anything, or learn anything." His eyes went to Jill, back to Thane. "So I had to pull a rabbit out of the hat. And I did! I gave them the *Geheime Staats Polizei*, Seyss-Inquart, and the 'little fleas have lesser fleas' routine."

Thane said, "And now?"

"Put yourself in Lessing's shoes," Sam told him. "He knows his bosses have a way of spotting men to watch the hired help. He knows I was in Germany long after I said I was run out — that I made a point of telling him so. He knows I'm no pilebuck. He knows —"

"Wait." Thane tipped his head to look up at Sam. The light made a dull shining on his cheek-bones; his eyes were suddenly old and tired. "You're saying you've given Lessing the idea you are the man sent here to watch him. Suppose you have? What have you gained?"

"Time," said Sam Gallagher.

Thane said, "Allow me to disagree."

"I've got an in. A contact we can use."

"Perhaps," said Thane. "But I doubt it."

Scowling, Sam Gallagher turned away. He circled the room, pausing by the fireplace, Jill's chair, the windows, and then came back to stand in front of Thane.

"Give me hell," he said. "Get it over."

"That would be swearing over spilt milk, wouldn't it, Sam?" A troubled smile touched Thane's lips. "You have created a situation. Our job is to examine it most carefully. To put ourselves, as you've suggested, in Mr. Lessing's boots."

"They don't fit," Sam growled.

"If Lessing's afraid, if he believes you're the man sent to watch him, what will his first move be, Sam?"

"He'll try to check."

"Exactly. He'll query his employers about you." Thane might have been talking of the weather so matter-of-fact was his voice. "I've no idea how they would sidestep, if you were the man. But you're not, Sam. And there is a fat dossier on file in Berlin, bearing your name. I'm sure Mr. Lessing's employers will forward the information contained therein, swiftly and gladly. When that happens —"

"My luck runs out," said Sam.

"There's another way to say it." Thane made a temple

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of his fingers. "Face this, Sam. If you stay here, if you go on working in the yard, you'll live no longer than it takes Lessing to get word from his superiors."

Jill McCann said, "No!"

Sam grinned at her. "Relax, McCann," he said. "If that's the way it is, I've got plenty of time. More than I'll need. Communication isn't so hot between here and Berlin these days."

"The incurable optimist," said Thane.

"Look," said Sam. "We've been on the ground a long time. We've nothing to show for it, unless you count blisters and callouses. We've learned a few names. We know 'something big's in the wind. And there they had us stopped. Simms is dead. Parrish would have none of me. McWhitty's afraid to make any kind of move."

"So you went to the top?"

Sam Gallagher grinned again. "Right. And while Lessing's waiting for orders, we'll crowd him. We'll do ourselves some good."

"They forced your hand," Thane said soberly. "You had to do something and do it fast. All lines of retreat were cut off, so you charged. Nice, solid thinking."

"Thanks, pappy."

Thane stood up. "But don't rush your luck. And phone me often — before and after shift, twice in the afternoon, twice in the evening. Dial, wait until the line opens, and then identify yourself." He went past Sam to stand beside Jill's chair. "My dear," he said, "you'll feel better after you've had a night's rest. Take an old man's word for it, these things work out."

"You try," said Jill. "But you're a very bad liar."

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Sam Gallagher worked Thursday with the diver. Bull-cooking. It was one of those March days. Clear and cold in the morning, with frost underfoot and ice on the mud-puddles. Around ten o'clock the sun climbed over the scaffolding of number Seven ways, spilling unexpected warmth down on number Eight, down on the river where Sam was working.

"Whadda yah know?" Sam said.

Brownie looked at the sun, the clear sky, felt the warmth that splashed off the white bulkhead of the diver's barge. He nodded in his big, slow way.

The tender spoke into the telephone.

"Hey, Gus! up here we got spring!"

The bubbles stopped and presently the silvered bulk of the diver's helmet floated up out of the depths and broke the surface. The helmet wheeled ponderously to find the sun, then turned to the men. The diver's face, small and vague, grinned at them through the window. He sank again, his exhaust whistling, disappeared.

The tender laughed.

"He says he oughta have a good coat of tan before the shift's over —"

Sam Gallagher stopped at the time office on the way out of the yard. Lea Dameron was there, just leaving, and when Sam came in, she looked at his eye, then bent her head to look at his ear. Speculatively, she said:

"You were never very handsome, anyway. . . ."

"But I had charm," Sam said.

Lea wore a sport suit — a plaid affair of soft browns and greens — a white blouse and a screw-ball hat. You couldn't see the hat till she moved her head, the soft turn of her hair curled up around it.

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"You going to see Jeff?" Sam asked.

She nodded. "I promised I'd stop by his place first. It needs warming and airing out."

"How's to bum a ride?"

She looked at him, undecided.

"No monkey business," he told her.

She smiled. "On your boy-scout honor, I suppose?"

"Sure. But with that hat, you needn't worry."

"I've got something else," she said. "Make a pass at me and I'll tell Kelly. He'll fix you up. . . ."

She took him to her car, drove him across town. There was a neighborhood of quiet streets, tree-lined curbs and neat houses set on the curve of a hill. Lea stopped in the heart of it, turned off the motor. A Scotty pup bounced and barked across the street, a kid went banging by on a bicycle.

"Nice, isn't it?" she said.

Jeff Gallagher's place was white brick and white siding, green lawns and white birch. There were shrubs, neatly clipped in all the right places, a picket fence between the house and garage. The house had a bay window. The garage had a weather-vane. Sam Gallagher looked at all this, and a queer tightness came into his throat.

"This is news to me," he said.

"Didn't Jeff —?"

"No. He keeps things like this for people he likes."

"But surely —" She stopped herself, biting her lips. "Shut up, Dameron" she said. Then, "You men are crazy, the whole confounded lot of you!"

Sam smiled. "I'm here, anyway."

He looked at the house.

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"Straight out of a picture book," he said.

"And bought," she told him, "and paid for."

"It would be. More than that, I'll bet he built most of it himself."

"He did. Shall we go in?"

"I'd like to. Things being what they are, I wouldn't get to, unless you took me."

"Oh, stop it!" Lea snapped.

They went up the walk.

"There's an automatic sprinkling system," Lea pointed out. "Just turn a valve and sit —"

"I like a hose," Sam said. "A man's got to stand out in the yard with a hose in his hand before it's home."

"He saved the back yard for that."

She took him through the gate in the picket fence to the back yard. There was a carpet of lawn, flower-beds, a fish-pool, a bird-house on a tall white pole. She pointed to a square flower-bed where green sprouts had pushed up in orderly rows.

"Tulips," she said. "And over there, daffodils."

"So Jeff's a gardener?"

"And a good one. He knows every flower and what makes each one click. I don't know where he got that."

"Mom was a flower fan," Sam said.

"Did she teach you too?"

"No. Mom had an urge to travel — she gave me that."

Lea took him into the house through the kitchen — an English kitchen, with brick showing in the walls and pans hanging above the range. A cook's kitchen.

"Don't tell me he keeps house like this!"

Lea shook her head and laughed.

"He's a man — right down to the dust in the corners

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and dishes in the sink. He hires the cleaning done. I help sometimes on week-ends."

The dining room opened on a brick terrace. The front door was halved. You could open the top part and look out — "or yell at your kids," Sam said. There was a cool, green rug in the living room. Sporting prints hung on the walls. Books made a splash of color in a well-filled case; the fireplace brass had a soft, rubbed shine. And the furniture was right, made for comfort and for living.

"I'll switch on the furnace," Lea said.

Sam nodded. "I'll look around."

Lea started to speak, then bit her lips again and turned away. Sam went toward the stairs. It was an open stairway with a wrought-iron rail. Sam touched the rail and went up slowly.

Jeff, lad, he thought, I know you now!

He found Jeff's bedroom. A man's room, with a man's taste for the old and well-used. Sam touched the bed. Not much to look at, but the most comfortable bed in the world. Sam knew, it had been his bed once. There was a gun rack against one wall. Sam picked up an old slide action .22. The octagon barrel and the scarred stock fit his hands. He worked the action. Jeff had fixed the ejector. There'd been a time when you needed a knife to pry the shells out. Sam sighted the gun and put it down.

He turned then. And he saw the pictures on the chest of drawers. One was of Lea Damaron. The other —

"Well!" Sam said. "Hello."

He sat on the footboard of the bed and looked at the second picture, not touching it, just looking. It was a picture of a woman, a woman of fifty. She had dark hair

and dark eyes; her strong mouth smiled at Sam. Her face was lined, perhaps more lined than it should have been. Still, she had lived every moment of her life fully, good or bad.

Three years. The sense of loss was still with Sam Gallagher. But the sharp edge of the pain was gone, the wound healed by the passage of time and the process of living. He could look at her picture and smile. And remember the way they'd talked in days that were gone.

"Gallagher reporting, Mom. . . ."

Like that. Sunlight falling on a breakfast table. Coffee and the blue drift of cigarette smoke. His voice telling of blunt-bowed tramps rolling across far seas. Bent-legged little yellow men; the golden women whose breasts were bare. A junk seen in silhouette at night, caught full against the moon.

And now? He could bring the record up to date. I owe her that, he thought. And in his mind he said, Gallagher reporting — I saw Westminster Abbey, the Cathedral of Rome, and the Vatican. I wandered out to Ship Street in Hong Kong. I lived in Paris for a while. Most places were pretty much what we thought they'd be. You'd have liked Spain, Mom. There's a place to live. He leaned back on the bed. Germany? — well, they have good scenery, good beer. Some nice people, some stink-ers. The stinkers had it when I was there. France is impractical. Russia needs a scrub brush and strong soap —

He let that go, the flood of memory strong in him. He thought of other things: a print shop in a mountain town — he'd been six or seven then — the smell of molten lead, of paper, and of ink. Odd the dreams a small boy has. He had wanted paper, reams of it, stacked high on

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a desk of his very own. At ten or twelve, somewhere in those half-forgotten years, he'd planned the books he'd one day write. "A part of you will go in each of them," she'd said. "A writer dances naked before the world."

You were right, he thought. But nobody looked at me. The book I did was pretty much a turkey, Mom.

She would have smiled at that. And then he could have told her why the others were unwritten still. I've been — well, tangled up in a lot of things. I was in Spain, in France. I saw that mess in Rotterdam. Words on paper seem silly now. Unimportant. You want to do what you can to help —

And Mom would have understood. She always had. She'd known how longing and hunger had driven him away, perhaps because that restlessness, that urge to move, had first been hers. She'd smiled and let him go, knowing he'd come back to say, "Gallagher reporting —"

Lea Damaron called, "Ready, Sam?"

"Yes," he said, "I'm coming."

Lea stopped at a flower shop. She bought a flower, a single, yellow, cup-like flower, no more than three inches high. Sam Gallagher chuckled when he saw it.

"You sure blow yourself, don't you?"

Lea smiled. "It's a very rare thing, this flower. A spoofer. And if you spoil it, I'll break the pot over your head."

Parked in the hospital drive, Lea Damaron picked the flower and carried the blossom in her hand. They went down a long corridor, thick with the clean smells a hospital has. A nun, shining and white, stopped Lea and looked at the flower.

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"Where on earth did you get it?"

"I picked it," Lea said.

When the nun had gone, Lea said archly, "You see? — it's working already."

Sam said, "Let's look at that again."

He looked, and saw only a small, yellow bloom. Not, as flowers go, particularly impressive. He shook his head, frowning. "Maybe I'm nuts —"

"You're just ignorant," Lea told him.

Jeff Gallagher was in a traction splint — "like the victim in any comic-strip," Sam said. Jeff's leg, huge in a plaster cast, was raised high. There were ropes from the cast over a frame at the foot of the bed to weights hanging just above the floor.

"Rig it yourself?" Sam asked.

"Not me," Jeff said. "I would've had a block there at my heel, a tail-hold on the bar. You'd get a purchase that way. You'd need only half the weights."

His voice was quiet and impersonal to Sam. His eyes were oddly dark against the white linen of the bed; there was pallor beneath his tan. But he smiled at Lea. He saw the flower, then, came up on his elbows.

"Hey!" he said. "Where'd you get it?"

"Out of your yard," Lea told him.

"The devil!" He took the flower, turned it in his hand. He was pleased, no doubt of it. Sam Gallagher was a little open-mouthed about all this.

"Pretty, isn't it?" Jeff asked.

"Sure is," Sam agreed.

Jeff turned suddenly to Lea. "How about Bradley — did he have any?"

"Nope. Not another in the neighborhood."

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Jeff Gallagher was tremendously proud.

Laughing, Lea said, "It's a crocus, Sam. The first outside flower of the year. To a flower enthusiast, that's an event. To have the first one in the neighborhood — well, look at him —"

"A blessed event," Sam grinned. "Hi, papa —"

Jeff sobered. "They tell me you dragged me out of the river, Sam. Damned near drowned yourself, doing it. Thanks, mister."

"Thank Bevins," Sam said. "You were a corpse when I found you. Bevins brought you around."

"I'll fix it with Bevins," Jeff said. And then, to Lea, "How was the place — milk all over the porch, I suppose? Papers in the yard?"

"I stopped them yesterday."

"Good girl. Air it out?"

She nodded. "Sam helped me."

"Sam did —?"

And Lea had made a mistake. She knew it instantly, for Jeff's mouth tightened, and he looked at Sam with a sudden, dark fury in his eyes. Jeff said nothing, and made a rude point of it. A flush stained Sam's forehead. He looked at his hands.

"It's a nice place, Jeff."

Jeff said nothing.

Oh, damn them —! Lea thought.

And she was angry too — with herself and with them. But mostly with them for the stupid quarrel they had between them. Men are such idiots! With no tact at all, with only a vast impatience for such nonsense, she broke loose on Jeff, flaring.

"And why shouldn't he?"

Thinly, Jeff said, "I like to invite my own guests."

"Do you?" Lea's brown eyes were furious. "If Sam isn't on your guest list — how about the man who saved your life?"

Jeff's lips tightened. He was a moment thinking, then he looked at Sam. "She's right," he said carefully. "And I'm sorry. You're welcome, mister. Any time."

Sam Gallagher's smile was thin and humorless.

"I'll drop in often —"

He was halfway to the door, when Lea Damaron stopped him, something desperate in her voice.

"Sam! — don't be a fool!"

Sam Gallagher turned.

Lea said, "He's sick, Sam. If you leave like this —" She bit her lips. "You can't, Sam!"

Sam Gallagher looked tired then. He rubbed his chin with a thumb-nail. He met her eyes, and Jeff's, and his head was bent a little to the side.

"It's all right," he said.

"Sure, Lea," Jeff said. "Forget it —"

And it was, quite suddenly, Jeff and Sam against her. Their quarrel was their own — what they did with it their business. But Lea was a problem they shared, a problem they would solve together.

"Damn you both!" she said.

She took her purse and left them.

Sam looked after her.

"A nice kid —"

Quietly, Jeff asked, "When were you married, Sam?"

A slow smile moved Sam's lips. "In '36."

"Where?"

The smile held. "London."

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"You could have been married here in '36. But you weren't — you chucked it. You don't get another chance, Sam. Remember that."

Sam nodded toward the door. "Mrs. Gallagher?"

Flatly, Jeff said, "Mrs. Jeff Gallagher."

Sam's smile went out.

"I'll see you around," he said.

He took the bus home.

Morning sun burned away the fog. Eight o'clock. Breakfast time for most of the world; noon hour for the lead-off shift. And Sam Gallagher propped his shoulders against the white wall of the deck house on the diver's barge. His open lunch-box, empty now, lay on his lap; a cigarette smouldered in his hand.

"It will soon be spring," Brownie said, in his big, slow way. "Before long a man can plant a garden."

"Victory garden?" Sam asked.

"No. Every year I have a garden."

The tender said, "How about you, Gus?"

"Me?" The diver was a stocky little man, bald save for a fringe of stiff, blond hair. "Seven days a week I crawl around in the mud. Down there." He jerked a thumb at the river. "When I get home I'm goin' to sit with a beer in my hand. My ol' lady gets her vegetables out of a can."

"What if the cans are gone?" Brownie asked.

"Okay," said the diver. "We'll eat steak."

Sam Gallagher leaned back, squinting against the glare of sun on water. Around him the talk ran on — the rough, profane talk of men who swore as naturally as they breathed. The bow wave of a passing tug lifted the barge, dropped it, and then swept on to spend itself on

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the deck of the shipway. Sam thought of Lea Damaron and Jeff, of Jeff's flat "You had your chance — you chucked it. So you're through, Sam. Remember that!"

His mind turned to Thane, to Jill McCann. And he wondered what she thought of all this — playing mother to Paul and Gretchen, playing wife to a man she scarcely knew. She was a handsome wench. If it weren't for this — this whole, bloody mess — she'd probably be married to some nice guy and have a home of her own and kids of her own. One of the better people, Jill McCann. She did her job and did it well. And no whining, no self-pity. "Take a leaf out of her book," Sam told himself sourly. "There's a gal who doesn't grouse when the going's rough —"

Max Lessing's face intruded on his thoughts then, strong-boned and smiling. Sam Gallagher let his mind run. And that was a mistake. Sweating impatience woke in him; a thin, inner voice shrilled of passing time — hours, days, weeks. *Der tag! Der tag!* He dug splayed fingers through his hair. And bright in his mind was the picture of the hell that could come — fire and explosion — fighting ships gutted on the ways—scaffolding smashed and swept aside. Brownie, Calaban, Bevins, Ikey — the good guys, the decent guys, caught without warning —

"It's close to whistle time," Brownie said.

Sam forced a grin. "That again."

And he turned to look down the long line of shipways. Each was a slanting deck, running from far inshore to far out in the river. Each was supported by piling and each — He frowned then. Piling. Sure! The deck of each shipway was a slanting floor. Below it —

"Brownie," he said. "I'm going ashore."

"Have at it," Brownie said.

Sam tied the skiff to a peevee sunk deep in the plank at the water's edge. He headed up across the shipway, smiling tightly. A hundred feet from the water, he ducked down between the bents of a Whirley trestle, and crouched there. Directly ahead of him was a small opening — a narrow aisle between the rows of piling that supported the plank of the shipway deck — a small mouth yawning on wet blackness. Sam Gallagher turned to peer in the opposite direction. There, again, he found an opening. He rolled aside an empty carbide can and went that way, squeezing into the narrow hole, crawling into the dark. Dimly, he heard the distant howling of a whistle.

He had gone perhaps a hundred feet before he stopped. Other discarded cans lay around him here, vague shapes in the dark. Turning, Sam retraced his steps, moving slowly, stunned by the enormity of his discovery. *A man could crawl under the shipway — under all the shipways!*

Sam Gallagher was under the trestle again, brushing sand and mud from his clothes, when booted feet hit the plank above him, when a big voice bellowed:

"Gallagher! Come outa there!"

Sam Gallagher said, "Coming up —"

He went up a brace to reach the deck. He found Kelly waiting for him — a shaggy, red bear of a man, with a cocky slant of grin. With his thumbs hooked in his belt and his shirt open to the waist. A grinning Kelly, with a wicked roll to his head and a wicked shine in his eyes.

"So now you're deaf?" he said.

"No," said Sam. "I'm not."

"Then you're hidin' out. You heard the whistle an' crawled down there out of sight." Kelly pursed his lips and spat. "I ought to fire yuh for that. I ought to kick your teeth in for doggin' it."

"Try," Sam told him.

Kelly's grin widened.

"I got a quart that says I can."

The words had a sneer and a bite. Anger flared up in Sam Gallagher. And suddenly Kelly was the focal point of all the frustrations, the hurt, the disappointments of the weeks past. That cocky grin of his wanted a fist in it — smack in the middle of it.

"Brace yourself!" Sam said.

He tried for the grin and missed. Kelly ducked a bit, rolling his head, and Sam's long left hand scraped his cheek. But Kelly was off-balance, pawing the air, and the gate was wide open. Sam Gallagher went in hard and fast. He got Kelly twice, up under the wishbone, and saw Kelly's eyes go wide. He threw his right hand at Kelly's chin. And Kelly was down, flat on the seat of his pants, with surprise on his face.

"You do better with water-wings," Sam taunted.

Kelly yelled, "I'll bus' you in two!"

He got up, scrambling in his panting rush. He came wading in, reaching for Sam Gallagher with those whistling hooks. Sam faded and drifted and moved away. He put the long left in Kelly's face and kept it there. Now and then, he stepped in close to bring the right up, short and hard. Then he was away again, safe behind the stabbing left again, waiting. Waiting for Kelly's Sunday punch.

There was blood on Kelly's nose and blood on his

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mouth. His eyes were wild and white. He came on, growling, "Fight, damn yuh! Stop runnin'!" He threw a hook that scraped Sam's ribs. Another that split the flesh of Sam's cheek. He moved his feet and set himself. And then the Sunday punch came down. Now! Sam thought. Step back. Sway a little and Kelly will tie himself in a knot. He'll hit the ground with that punch. And here it is — a clean shot at Kelly's chin — with Kelly bent over like a drunk on a ship's rail.

The jolting shock of that blow was a blaze of pain in Sam's wrist, his forearm, his shoulder. And the sound of it was the sound of a meat-ax in a butcher's block. Kelly's hands were limp at his sides. He took a fumbling half-step, then pitched forward on his face.

"Kelly, boy," Sam panted, "that squares us!"

Quitting time. Sam Gallagher joined the crowd at the gate. There was a patch of white tape on his cheek; his right hand was puffed and swollen. But he had a grin for the guard as he shouldered past, a grin for the whole wide world. And then he met Kelly.

"I been waiting for yuh," Kelly said.

Sam Gallagher's grin froze. "Why?"

"I pay my bills. Right on the nose, I pay 'em." Kelly essayed a smile, a sheepish smile. He fumbled in his coat pocket. "I quit a little early, see. I get me to a store, an' I buy this —"

He thrust a package at Sam, a round package, about a foot in length. It was smooth to the touch beneath its wrapping. A bottle. A quart bottle.

"What's this?" Sam said.

Embarrassed, Kelly said, "I told yuh I had a quart that

said I could beat your ears off. That's a bet, see? Turns out I lose." A red flush crept up Kelly's neck; he swallowed. "I pay my bills. That's your quart."

Sam Gallagher hefted the package awkwardly. Four hours ago, Kelly had charged him with both hands swinging and murder in his heart. Now, red-faced and fumbling, he was saying, in the only way he knew, he held no grudge. There was a word for a man like that. A kicked-around word that has little place in the world today. But Kelly rated it — red-headed Kelly, with his tough, battered face, caulked boots, his open shirt and his barrel chest. Kelly, who'd have a go at anything or any man. Indeed there was a word for him. Sportsman.

"Kelly," Sam said, "you're all right."

"You ain't so bad yourself," Kelly said gruffly. And instantly added, "For a green hand, that is."

Sam Gallagher laughed. He stripped the wrapping from the bottle, twisted the cork free. "Have one?"

"After you," Kelly said.

They had a drink apiece. A big drink. Then Sam looked at the bottle, at the broadly grinning Kelly.

"Have another," he invited.

Kelly said, "Don't care if I do."

It was late evening when Kelly's heavy coupé made a wide and careful swing to reach West Cherry Drive. Kelly's big hands gripped the steering wheel tightly; his face was twisted into a scowl of fierce concentration.

"Am I doin' okay?" he asked.

"Fine," said Sam. "You do fine."

"One eye's the way to do her," Kelly said. "She don't jump around so much if you keep one eye shut."

"Keep her shut then," Sam advised.

He tried that himself, laughing softly. The street still had a tendency to dip and swoop, but it was better. Distinctly better. "Second house in the next block," he said, and tipped his head to squint at Kelly. Some man, Kelly. When he hit you, you rattled. Pull a saw with him and he wore you down. Match drink for drink with him, and pretty soon organs began to sing in your head and your feet got ideas of their own.

"This the place?" Kelly said.

"Right," Sam answered. "Come on in."

"Will it be okay with the little woman?"

"She'll love it," Sam said firmly.

They went up the walk together, weaving only a little. Kelly sat down on the edge of the porch. "I got my caulks on," he said. "Is it okay if I go in in my sock feet?"

"It's fine," Sam said.

The front door opened then. Sam turned to see Paul peering out at them, an oddly shy and troubled Paul, whose eyes were enormous in his small face. Sam Gallagher crooked a finger at the boy. Hesitantly, Paul came to his side.

Sam said, "This's Mr. Kelly, Paul."

Paul bent his head. "How do you do, sir."

"I do pretty good," Kelly said, then stopped. He looked at Sam. "Did you hear that?" he demanded. "The kid says 'Sir' to me. He says 'Sir' to Kelly." He thrust out one big hand. "Shake, son," he said, "you're okay."

"Thank you, sir," Paul said.

Kelly grinned. "There he goes again!"

"You haven't seen anything yet," Sam told him. "Wait'll you meet the rest of the family."

Jill was waiting for them in the living room. She was standing in front of the fireplace, slender and small in a dress that was softly blue. Sam heard Kelly's mutter of surprise, and felt a glow of pride. *She's beautiful!* he thought. *Damned if she isn't!* Then Jill was coming toward them, laughter on her lips.

"Fine specimens," she said, "the two of you."

Sam said, "We had a couple on the way home."

"A couple?" Jill's brows went up. "Two?"

"Twenty-two, ma'am," Kelly said, "and that's the cold truth of it. Your ol' man — your husband an' me had a spat of trouble this morning. An' a kind of a bet. So when I lost it seemed like a good idea to —"

"Drink up the bet," Sam finished.

Jill said, "Who won this time?"

"He did," said Kelly. "He whipped me good."

Jill shook her head. "You men!"

Sam Gallagher switched on the radio, dialed a noisy dance band. There was laughter in the room. And rough, swift talk of things Jill McCann did not understand — braces, nigger-heads, stern-hauls, towers. Then Paul brought his toys for Kelly to inspect. The big man's voice turned gentle; his hands were amazingly deft. He repaired a broken dump-truck with a pocket-knife and a bit of wire. He whispered in Paul's ear; they shook hands gravely.

"This's some boy you've got," he said. "Polite. I never seen a boy so polite. 'Sir' he says to me."

Jill smiled. "We like him."

"How about a short one?" Sam asked.

"Well—" Kelly looked at Sam, and then at Jill. "Sam, boy," he said, "I think we've both had a plenty."

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He left them soon after that. When he'd gone, Sam stretched his legs and grinned at Jill. "McCann," he said, "you're wonderful."

"Want another drink?" she asked.

"If you'll have one too, McCann."

"I'll have one."

She brought the drinks from the kitchen. Lifting her glass, she showed him a sparkle of laughter in her eyes.

"To the pilebucks?" she asked.

"And Betsy—"

They drank, and then Jill McCann sat on the davenport with Sam Gallagher, facing him, her dress drawn taut across her breasts by the half turn of her body.

"And how is Betsy?"

"Good," Sam said. He slid down on the small of his back. "Today Betsy looked fine. Today I got caught in one of her gears and it turns out they're made of good stuff. No *ersatz* in Betsy."

"The gear was Kelly?"

Sam nodded. "With teeth like a buzz-saw."

"Are they all like that?"

"Well, no. But the few like him keep the average up." He was quiet a moment, his forehead wrinkled with thinking, his mouth rough and pensive.

"Yesterday," he said, "last year, all I knew about the working man was what I saw in the papers. Unions, strikes — all such. None of it good. Today, I know him, and I tell you, McCann, it's a load off my chest."

"You were worried?"

"Suppose you bought a car — the biggest, shiniest car in the world. It's parked in front of your house. The

neighbors gather round. It's fine, they say. only it won't run. The motor's junk — like a worn-out alarm clock. So you're scared and sick."

"I'd be that."

"So you're afraid to use it. But comes a day when you've got to, comes an emergency. You step on the starter and she goes. You step on the gas and she lets go with a roar that blows your neighbors flat on their behinds. You'd feel good, wouldn't you? — like yelling and thumbing your nose at the world. That's me, McCann. I'm thumbing my nose. . . ."

"You're drunk," Jill said. "You've licked Kelly and you're sliding down a rainbow."

Sam grinned at her. "You're a sour-puss."

She said, "Well, how could Kelly — how could one man change the whole picture?"

"I'm not talking about Kelly. Or Jeff, or Ikey, or Bevins. They're part of it, sure. But the picture's big." He spread his arms. "This big and bigger."

"That's a mural," she said.

"You're right. A mural's made up of a lot of scenes. A lot of characters doing a lot of different things. You look at a mural. All those people doing all those things — it doesn't make sense. Then suddenly it does. There's a theme. A single theme for the whole mural. Progress, maybe, or Courage, or Science —"

"Paint me a mural," she said.

"I will."

Sam Gallagher got to his feet. He walked the length of the room, restless with energy, and his eyes were alive with something important, something that mattered. He came back to stand in front of her.

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"McCann," he said, "you're going to meet the working stiff. The lad who's building the ships, the guns, the planes. Not the brains; the muscle. The push that turns the wheels, the horse that makes the buggy go. Won't all be good, or all bad. It's a mural, remember. You'll meet a lot of characters. But when I'm done, you'll see the theme — Joe, the working man. You'll know Joe for what he is, not what you've heard he is. You'll be able to decide for yourself what our chances are. Joe's the lad who'll win this war or lose it, not you or I. Remember that."

She smiled up at him. "I'll remember —"

"Meet Johnny, then," he said. "Johnny's a part of Joe. An irresponsible part. The wry smile Joe carries at the corners of his mouth —"

Johnny Burke. Short — Sam measured his height with an extended hand — red-headed, freckled. Not a guy you'd look at twice. But a nice little guy, with a dry smile and a shy way of looking at you. Johnny, forty-five, a pilebuck, and a good mechanic.

"Married?" Jill asked.

"He had a wife —"

But she'd left him fifteen years ago. That was Johnny — no woman wanted him for keeps. There were women, of course — the corner beer-hall kind. He drank with them when he was lonely, took them to bed, if he needed that. But responsibility was not for Johnny. Thirty years in construction, but no more than a year of that as foreman.

Johnny knew the work all right. If you had a machine and no operator, Johnny would run it. If you had a piece of heavy work and no machine, Johnny would figure a rig for you. A new man? — give him to Johnny. "If you

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can't find a hammer, son," he'd tell him, "get a nice, round rock. . . ." Blacksmith, rigger, burner, welder, carpenter — anything. For six weeks. Then one day he wouldn't show. "Damn that guy!" the foreman would say, but he'd wait a week before he went after him.

"Why a week?" Jill asked.

"It took a week," said Sam.

And sometimes longer. But he'd come back — to this job or another. A pale Johnny, with hands that shook and a manner faintly apologetic.

"Y'know," he'd say, "time sure goes fast when I'm drinkin'. I step up to the bar for a short one. It's Friday. I have the drink, maybe two. Then I look around. It's Friday, all right, but not the same one. Somewhere, somehow a week's gone by —"

"That," Sam said, "is Johnny —"

Jill said, "I like him —"

"Then there's a man named Russ."

Russ was fifty, dark-featured and sharp, and an old hand at building. Building anything — dams, bridges, roads, ships — anything at all. He walked with a heavy limp — a timber had crushed his leg. His left arm had been shattered by a bad fall and never healed quite right. Russ did good work, fine work, but conditions never satisfied him. Russ had a perpetual grouch.

"He turned Jeff in as a high-baller."

"What's that?" Jill asked.

"A foreman who works his men too hard."

It was all part of the labor Union's job. When a man was reported as a high-baller, the steward sent a man to watch the crew work. If it turned out the men were worked unreasonably hard, the Union pulled the fore-

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man's card, and the foreman went hungry until the Union decided to reinstate him.

"What did they do to Jeff?"

"Nothing —"

Jeff worked his men hard, but not too hard. So Russ's beef had done no good. But there'd been other beefs — a dry shed where the men could eat and dry their clothes, extra pay for water work, a shack where the men could lock their tools.

"There's a place for Russ," Jill said.

"Sure there is," Sam agreed.

And for a kid like Allen. Allen was nineteen, maybe twenty, and big, the way a bull is big. "But with the temperament of a cow," Sam said. Allen had blue eyes and fair hair. His slow way of moving, of doing things, would drive a foreman nuts at times. But you could get mad at Allen, you could cuss him out from eight o'clock till the noon whistle and all it got you was a slow smile and a "Take it easy, Pop. We'll get 'er done —"

"Ikey worked with him," Sam said.

One day Allen had quit work in the middle of a shift. "I got an urge to travel," he told Ikey. Like that. He got his tools together and took them off the job. Ikey didn't see him again till two months later. "Where you been?" Ikey asked him. "Shipped out on a tanker," Allen answered. "Got torpedoed and shot up some —"

Sam said, "And last week he shipped out again."

"Well!" Jill said.

"Then there's Kelly," Sam went on. "You know him — a guy who drinks and fights just for the hell of it."

"I know Kelly."

"All right. Here's O'Hara."

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You couldn't guess O'Hara's age. You'd say somewhere between forty and sixty. O'Hara was spruce and snappy for an old hand. He dressed like a college boy when he had the money, and he usually had it — craps or poker, if there was no work around. A good mechanic, O'Hara, when he had his work-pants on, but he was a better hand at getting married.

"Married?" Jill asked.

"Six times."

The way it worked, O'Hara married a girl. They'd be happy for a month or so or even a year. But some gal would come along, some nifty in a tight skirt, and wave a fanny at O'Hara and O'Hara wandered off. The wives divorced O'Hara, not O'Hara the wives. He kept the things he had — if you were ever O'Hara's wife, you always were. If you needed a dollar, he had one for you, or a drink, or a place to spend the night.

"Like Beatrice," Sam said.

Bea was the third wife. She'd married a farmer after O'Hara, and one Saturday she'd come to town on a shopping trip. O'Hara loaned her his car and fifty bucks. She did her shopping and met O'Hara as he came off shift. Saturday night. They did a job of Saturday night and Sunday. Monday morning O'Hara put her on the train for home, a happy woman, and certainly one well cared for.

"That," Jill said, "is disgusting!"

"Depends on your point of view," Sam said.

Sam thought the system had an element of good. There was Lili for instance, the second Mrs. O'Hara. Things hadn't gone so well with Lili. O'Hara found her in the county hospital. O'Hara had a look at her. It was a bum

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show — that cough and thin as she was — he gave her a week at the most.

"Lili," he said, "dammit, you shoulda called me."

"I was sore," she told him.

"You was sore," he said. "All right. But now you ain't. Now you're a sick kid — you got a fight on your hands. I'm gonna get you out of here. Specialists and a sanatorium. I'm gonna —"

"No, Jack —"

So she knew.

"How long, kid?" O'Hara asked.

"Maybe a week," she said.

"Jesus!" O'Hara said. Then, "Look, kid. Lemme get you something. Anything you want. Something nice."

"Would you?"

"Anything."

"Get me a nightgown," she whispered. "An extra nice one, with lace and satin. And Jack, get me a real pretty potted plant —"

Sam Gallagher made another drink. Jill McCann looked at him sharply and long, distrust a faint shadow in her eyes.

"Gallagher," she said, "are you lying?"

Sam raised his hand.

She said, "If you are, I'll find it out some day."

"I've met these people," Sam said. "I know them."

He walked the length of the room and came back.

"There's Ed Williams," he said. "You won't like Williams. I don't like him. But he's a part of Joe. The bad part. He's the ugly look in Joe's eye, when Joe's had one too many —"

Ed Williams looked like a preacher, or anyway a

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deacon. A tall man with a solemn look, his voice was deep and gentle, from way down here. "Maybe it's an undertaker I'm thinking of," Sam said. One noon hour Williams was talking to Ikey. An easy-going squirt, Ikey, he'd listen to any man's say. It seemed that William's wife had deserted him.

"She was to meet me," Williams told Ikey, "at her mother's. Her and the kids. Only she didn't show up. Didn't leave no word or nuthin'. That was two weeks ago. I ain't seen or heard of her since. God! — a man likes to know where his kids're at —"

The whistle blew just then.

The men went to work, and Sam walked with Ikey.

"Tough about Williams," Sam said.

"That son of a bitch!" Ikey said.

"Williams?"

"Yas, Williams." Ikey swore again. "Sam, you can't get drunk and slap the Christ out of a woman three times a week and expect to keep her around. The hell with Williams!"

Jill McCann nodded. "Ikey's right!"

Sam agreed.

"But you'd like Big George."

A Norwegian, Big George. A sailor when he was a kid, later a lumberjack, a pilebuck, a construction hand. And a rum-runner, back when there was rum to run. A drinking man. You couldn't tell it — Big George was pink-cheeked and healthy, the way those Scandinavians are — but he'd had a quart a day for twenty years.

"Is that an achievement?" Jill asked.

"When you know the rest of it."

Some would think a quart a day a feat to brag about,

but Big George never did. He liked to tell you that in twenty years he'd not missed a day's work for drinking or any other reason. "And that's a brag," Sam said. Drinking meant a lot to George, but the work meant more. The work, and something else. If you hired George, you had a man working for you — a day's work for a day's pay, and every day a day's work.

"Integrity," Jill said, "and a funny place for it."

"So it is," Sam said.

He got up and put his glass on the mantel above the fireplace. He lifted his arms in a gesture.

"There's your mural," he said. "And what do you think of Joe now?"

Jill's small face was thoughtful.

"He's no bargain," she said at last. "But then, I guess he'll do. To me, Joe is a man of thirty-five or forty, a good-sized man, strong. He does a lot of drinking, though he carries it well enough. He swears. With women, he's not so much immoral as unmoral, and when he gets a mean streak he's a frightful louse."

"There's some of that in all of us."

"Yes, there is." Jill tipped her head back, thinking. "Joe's got something, though. He is, as you say it, a good mechanic. He's loyal, and I believe he takes a fierce pride in what he does. He's not afraid — not afraid of anything — his boss, or you and me, or what we think of him, or what his friends think. An individualist, Joe, brawling and bumptious —"

Sam Gallagher smiled a little.

"Would you trust him to build your ships?"

"Yes," Jill said, "I would —"

The telephone rang sharply then.

"I'll get it," Jill said.

She was gone but a moment. When she returned, her face was white, shocked. "Sam, that was Thane!"

He got to his feet. "Yes?"

"McWhitty's been killed!"

"Damn them!" Sam said.

He slammed and locked the bathroom door. He got out of his clothes and under the shower. And he stayed there, the cold tap turned full on, until his flesh was blue and numb. Until the icy spray cut through the fog in his mind. He went downstairs then, wearing slippers and a robe. Jill had the coffee ready. She watched in silence while he drank one cup. Another.

"How is it?" she asked anxiously.

"I'm frozen clear to the bone," he said. "My feet are sober; they work all right. But my head's still doing a rhumba. I can't think." He put the cup on the drain-board and turned toward the swinging door.

She said, "What now, Sam?"

"Another shower. More coffee." He tried to grin. "I'll take the course again. I'll do the whole thing over!"

CHAPTER SIX

SAM GALLAGHER found his clothes laid out upon his bed. Downstairs, there was coffee waiting, hot and black and strong. Tomato juice laced with Tabasco sauce. Good old McCann! Sam thought, and drank them both. He lit a cigarette then. His hands trembled only a little.

Not too bad — he decided.

He supposed Jill was dressing. He waited a moment or two and then called her. No answer. He started for the stairs. As he reached the hallway, the front door opened and Jill was there. Jill, dressed for the street, and a gray-haired woman who wore a man's topcoat over a bathrobe and pajamas.

"Mrs. Campbell," Jill explained. "She'll stay with the children."

Mrs. Campbell looked grave and sympathetic.

"I do hope it isn't serious," she said.

Puzzled, Sam said, "So do I."

Jill was holding his topcoat. "Make yourself comfortable, Mrs. Campbell," she said. "I put blankets on the davenport. You can go to sleep." She gave Sam his hat. "We'll get a taxi at the corner —"

They went out of the house, turned the corner and walked the length of the block to the next corner. Sam watched his feet. They could follow a line — he was doing all right. They crossed the street and walked another block. The taxi was waiting there.

Sam looked at Jill. "What a woman!"

Inside the cab, Sam turned down a window and bent

his head into the cold stream of air. Jill watched, a frown marring her forehead, doubt in her dark gray eyes.

"How do you feel, Sam?"

"Just fair," he said.

"Can you think straight?"

"If I could just catch up. This Mrs. Campbell now —"

"Our neighbor," Jill told him. "I've come to know her pretty well. Back yard conversations. Your father had a stroke. Naturally she would stay with the children. Neighbors are like that."

"My father had a stroke." Sam rattled his head to clear it. "This taxi — did you by any chance make it out of a pumpkin?"

"Are you being smart?"

"McCann —" He reached for her hand, squeezed it. "In my fumbling way, I'm trying to say you're wonderful!"

She said, "Thanks, Gallagher."

They left the taxi a block from Thane's office. The building was dark, except for a small light in the foyer. Newspapers were hung over the cigar-stand.

Sam said, "No elevator."

They climbed the five flights, turned down a long, dark hall. Sam used a key on Thane's door, and Jill went through the door quietly. Sam followed. He stopped her, his hand firm upon her arm.

This was Thane's office. His living quarters were beyond; the door stood open there. They could see Thane standing at a small work-bench. A pool of light fell upon him from a single, shaded globe, turning his skin parchment white. He was a small man, Thane. Small and intense and quite absorbed in what he was doing.

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The bench was a watch-maker's bench, and on it was a miniature lathe, the other tools of the trade. In Thane's slim hands was the movement of a fine woman's watch. On a glass panel before him were minute screws and wheels. As Sam and Jill looked on, Thane took an invisible something from the watch and put it on the glass.

"Blowing off steam," Sam whispered in Jill's ear. "The way I'd pick a fight or get drunk —"

Jill McCann nodded. "I know."

"Easy does it then."

They crossed the room.

Quietly, Sam said, "Hello, Thane."

The small man went rigid. Not suddenly — he held himself from that. But he was taut until the urge to nervousness had passed. Then he turned easily. He took the jeweler's glass from his eye and smiled at them.

"McCann," he murmured, "and Gallagher."

The light struck the shadows from his thin-boned face, etched deep the lines about his mouth. Inwardly, Thane was tight-drawn, quivering. You knew it, looking at him, though there was nothing in his voice, or his eyes, or the quiet way he smiled to tell you that. You sensed it. You felt it in the careful way he moved and spoke. You knew it — knowing Thane.

He slanted a nod at the watch movement.

"I'll be a day or two late, Jill."

She pretended impatience. "A fine thing!" she said, then turned to Sam. "He was going to clean it for me, and look — a hundred pieces!"

Sam Gallagher smiled.

"These amateur mechanics —"

For a time they all were still. Sam looked at Thane and

then at the scattered pieces of Jill's watch. Amateur! That was hardly the word for Thane. Once, long back, watches had been his life. He knew them as few men do. Sam had learned that at a banquet in Paris, where the speeches were long and dull. He'd stolen a glance at his watch. James Thane, a stranger then, had smiled across the table.

"A beautiful watch," he'd said softly, and named the make. "It was made in the States. It's as American as a dipper of ice cream, a hot dog, or a ball game."

"You're right," Sam had said.

"Does it keep good time?"

"No. It needs cleaning now."

Thane's smile had widened. "Ah! Let me —"

Because of that — because of a bit of grime on the balance wheel of a watch made in the States — the two had met and talked. And then — Certain facts had to be learned in Spain. Sam Gallagher had friends in Spain — in Warsaw, in Prague, in Budapest. He carried a dispatch case into Lisbon for James Thane, and exchanged it for one carried by a man who had just flown from Berlin. He took four photographs, no bigger than a dime, out of Rotterdam the week before the bombers came.

And only Thane, the dealer in fine watches, knew the full meaning of each move and counter move. They brought him bits — a sheet of paper, a whispered word, a drawing — he fitted them into a picture that made sense. He held all threads in his cool, deft hands. When the tide of war engulfed the Continent, he brought them home — Sam and Jill and the others who were left. There had been a job for them in Newark, another in Detroit. Now this —

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Thane said, "Sit down, you two."

They found chairs. Sam lit a cigarette for Jill, lit one for himself. Thane was quiet, thinking. He turned a tiny screwdriver in his fingers; light shafted from its polished surfaces. He spoke to them:

"I was upset when I called."

"A little," said Jill.

Thane bent his head. "Mac was close to me. There was the business of telling his wife. Ellen is my sister, you know. I —" He broke off with a thin shrug.

"Tough," Sam said.

Thane's voice turned matter-of-fact. "The police found Mac in his car, down on the water-front. He had been shot through the heart."

"By a person or persons unknown?"

Thane made a dry sound. "The police are doing all they can. The evidence they found points to a hitch-hike robbery and murder."

Jill said, "It's a damned shame!"

Thane looked at her and again a faint weariness touched his voice. "This is war," he told her. "Our battle-front is here. A man's life is important only in the effect his death has on the action as a whole. There is scant room for sentiment. And what there was —" he smiled a little "— I've used completely."

Sam Gallagher said, "It's still a shame."

"Stop it!" Thane said.

He bent his head forward, resting his forehead on slender fingertips. He had a moment to himself, and what he thought was no one's business but his own. He drew a deep breath. He spoke again — the old Thane, crisp and factual.

"I had a couple of miracles in mind when I called you," he said. "You were to work them, Sam. You were going to tell me why they killed Mac, and what it meant to us. Since then, I've sobered up a bit. I've thought it all out, found my own answers. Your job is to check me."

"Let's have it," Sam said.

"We'll start with Simms —"

Thane straightened, the light struck down across his face, showed it sharp and intent.

"There was time," he said, "after Simms recognized you and before Mac caught him, for Simms to contact someone. And it is possible that someone saw Mac kill Simms. But in your opinion, neither is likely."

Sam nodded.

"So Simms' death had nothing to do with Mac's. Now, your dealings with Lessing. If you were careful in your meetings with Mac, there is no way Lessing could connect you and Mac. Therefore, your dealings with Lessing have no bearing on Mac's death —"

"You're making sense," Sam said.

"And the accident that injured Jeff — Mac told me that he was staying clear of it. You were there, on the ground, and he considered it your problem. So the accident was not responsible —"

"Keep 'er goin'," Sam said.

"Which leaves but one other possibility. A mistake on Mac's part. Mac was nervous — you told me that, and I knew it — but I think it was the pressure. Give Mac a real problem and he could handle it."

"He did all right with Simms."

"We'll say, then, Mac made no mistake." Thane lifted both hands. "Where does that bring us?"

Sam smiled. "They had no reason, so they didn't kill him."

"Exactly."

Jill said, "You two are crazy!"

Thane turned to her. "It's our way of saying we're wrong, but we don't know where."

Sam frowned a moment. "The odds are Mac muffed it."

"But you don't know how," Jill said.

"Or to what extent," Thane added.

They were silent, thinking. Thane got up and walked to the window. From there, he said, "And the extent is important. Did Mac's mistake involve only himself, or did it include you two? If you are included, you'll end up with Mac."

"But, you're in the clear."

"We're all in a difficult position."

"What's tough about it?" Sam asked. "All we need here is a little head-work. That's my department. Give me a stone wall, and I use my head on it. I just lower my head and butt —"

"Jill?" Thane asked.

Jill was powdering her nose.

"I'll butt with Gallagher."

She looked at the clock then. "We've got an hour and a half to get home," she told Sam. "There's your lunch to put up, and breakfast —"

Thane turned from the window.

"I'll drive you over."

They were at the door, in the light there, when Thane saw Sam Gallagher's face closely for the first time — saw it with a mind free from burden, with eyes that had time, now, to notice small things.

"Well, well —" he murmured.

He took Sam's chin, turned his face. "Lips swollen, eye black, nose like a blob of putty. And your ear — hmmm. Very nice. You look like a third-rate pugilist."

Sam stood back and looked at Thane. A very trim Thane, very small. Carefully brushed, carefully dressed. Sam said, "Bowler hat, hard collar, black tie, stick. Hmmm. You look like somebody's butler."

Thane smiled, quiet whimsy in his eyes.

"And in a sense, I am." He stood very straight. "James Thane, sir. A gentleman's gentleman. I'm in the service of a fine old man with a vast amount of money and no end of trouble. A kindly soul —" he put his hand to his chin "— with whiskers —"

Sam clicked his heels, saluted.

Quietly, Jill said, "It's not a bit funny —"

There was a small light burning in the living room. Mrs. Campbell had not used the davenport. She'd been reading, and she'd fallen asleep with a book in her lap and a quiet weariness in the lines of her face.

"Nice people," Sam whispered to Jill.

Jill pushed him toward the stairs.

"Change your clothes — I'll waken her."

Sam stopped in the children's room for a look at the kids. Gretchen was sleeping front-side down. Her knees were drawn far up under her, and her small behind was elevated clear of the covers. Sam drew the covers up, patted her behind. Gretchen sighed and hunted for her thumb. Paul opened his eyes.

"Hello, Gallagher."

"Hey!" said Sam. "Get to sleep before I slug you."

Paul grinned.

"Like Kelly, huh?"

Jill was busy with wax-paper and sandwiches when Sam came stocking-footed into the kitchen. "I can't find my shoes," he said. Jill answered, without turning, "You left them behind the bathroom door."

Sam watched her, watched the lithe movements of her back, the deft way her hands worked. "I'll butt with Gallagher —" She'd said it, knowing it meant a scrap, knowing she'd have to fight it with lunches, cooking and taking care of kids.

McCann, he thought, you're a fine institution.

He went after his shoes.

Jill was opening his lunch-box when he returned. She found a sandwich there, uneaten. She put her hands on her hips, turned.

"You don't like my lunches?"

Sam grinned at her lazily.

"Sure. But I'm not a new hand any more. A new hand never gets enough to eat. I'm toughened in — I don't need so much."

"But you do!" Jill insisted. "I — I looked it up. A man who works hard needs —"

She broke off, for Sam was coming toward her. The smile was still on his lips, and now there was a glint of devilment in his eyes.

Nervously, she said, "Gallagher —!"

She tried to step to the side, but Sam's arm stopped her, his hand holding the edge of the drainboard. She tried to go the other way, but Sam's other arm was there, penning her in. She faced him, then, doubt and uncertainty in her eyes, a faint flush on her cheeks.

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"Do I scare you?" he asked.

"A wolf always does —" she answered.

She put her hands on his shoulders and pushed. He bent his arms and pulled himself to her, forcing her against the drain-board. She tried pushing again, and gave it up. Her hands were on his shoulders; she left them there.

"What's this?" she asked.

From close above her, he said, "I am suddenly overwhelmed with what a fine wife you are. This putting up my lunch and worrying about how much I eat. You must think a great deal of me."

"It's my job —"

Her voice was only a murmur, for his lips were very near hers, and looking at them, her mind was distracted. There was no good in trying to get away. He knew what he wanted, and he had the strength for it. Damn him, anyway, she thought. Damn you, Gallagher, for doing this to me. She moved her hands up on his shoulders a little. Maybe she was going to like this —

The light came then. A flash of it from the street that hit the kitchen window glass briefly and then turned down the side of the house. There was motor sound in the driveway, the whisper of brakes.

Sharply, Sam said, "Down —!"

He caught her arm with a rough hand, drew her to the floor, below the cupboards, out of line with the windows. Jill's gray eyes were wide and round. Sam's face was heavy, the turn of his mouth sullen. The motor sound died, and there was a moment of thick, pervading quiet.

"What —?" she asked breathlessly.

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"I'll guess with you," he said.

He pulled her forward to her hands and knees. "Into the hall," he told her. She crawled quickly ahead of him to the hall, to the darkness there. They came erect again, listening.

They heard a car door shut gently. They heard a faint movement of feet along the concrete drive. The sound faded beneath the kitchen window. The owner of the feet might have gone out on the back lawn, or he might still be under the window. A front porch step creaked, then, and a board in the porch itself. Feet moved carefully to the front door, stopped there. Quiet again, and the most insistent part of it was the fact the doorbell did not ring.

Sam put his mouth close to Jill's ear.

"Into the bathroom. Lock the door. Sit on the floor under the window."

"But the children —!" she protested.

"I'll take care of —"

He broke off, swearing. Jill had ducked under his arm and scooted swiftly up the stairs. Sam waited on through another long moment. Still the doorbell did not ring. Faint light filtered through the two small windows in the door, but no shadow touched their glass. Sam checked the windows in the living room. No shadows there. He took a gun from the desk drawer and went back into the hall.

Close to the door, he waited, listening.

There was movement on the porch. Feet, probably, and a rustle that was unmistakably paper. It stopped, and silence came again. Sam looked toward the back of the house. No sound there, nothing. He turned again

to the front door, and a knock sounded on the door there, hesitant, jerky. No more than a foot from his chest, the suddenness of it made Sam jump. His skin went tight and crawling. He saw the man, then, saw his outline through the small window.

Turning, he went quickly into the living room. He put the gun in the desk, ran on tip-toe to the kitchen, then came back through the hall again, walking heavily. He punched the porch-light switch, opened the door.

"Kelly!" he said. "Come in."

Kelly grinned at him. Kelly's red hair was plastered with combing. He'd shaved this morning, probably with difficulty, because his eyes were puffed and cut, and he had a lump on his jaw. His arms were full of packages.

"Hi, Sam —"

And Sam had a grin for Kelly — a relieved grin that spread thoroughly over his face. He took Kelly through the hall to the kitchen.

"I didn't know what the hell to do," Kelly said, putting his packages on a chair. "I saw the light in the kitchen — thinks me, you're up. But when I go around there, I don't hear nothing. Maybe you left it on accidental. Then I sneak around to the front. I'm scared if I ring the bell I'll wake the missus and the kids. So I wait, figuring if you was up, you must of heard me drive in. But you don't come to the door. Thinks me, dammit, I'm liable to get shot standin' here. So then I try a little knock —"

"I was in the bathroom," Sam said.

Kelly looked past Sam's shoulder.

"Mornin', Missus Gallagher."

Sam turned quickly. Jill was there — Jill with her hair

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a little mussed, with sleep in her eyes. She wore a house-coat and she smiled beautifully at Sam.

"I heard you drive in," she told Kelly, "and I couldn't imagine why Sam didn't answer the door —"

Sam laughed. "I was putting up my lunch."

He winked at her and turned to Kelly.

"Had your breakfast?"

Kelly had had breakfast, but he could go for a cup of coffee. He'd stopped in, he told them, because Sam didn't have a car and this was right on his way to work. He'd stop every morning. Sam said that was fine. He offered Kelly a drink, and Kelly had a small one, neat. Sam thought he could do with one himself, and he took one, slightly larger, also neat. Jill didn't have any.

She set about getting Sam's breakfast, and from a chair at the kitchen table, Kelly nodded at her with his red head.

"There," he whispered, "is a dame for you."

With feeling, Sam said, "Wonderful!"

Feet pattered on the stairway, and Paul's small head popped around the hallway door. Paul saw Kelly and grinned.

"Hello, Mr. Kelly!"

Jill said, "Paul! You shouldn't —"

Kelly's voice boomed through hers. "Hiya, kid — what're you doin' up?"

"He shouldn't be," Jill insisted. "Paul —"

"Aw," Kelly said, "lemme talk to 'im."

At Jill's "For just a minute," Paul skipped past her to stand before Kelly, slim and small and barefooted, a boy in wrinkled pajamas. He looked at Kelly's lips,

and the lump on Kelly's jaw. He compared this to the damage on Sam's face.

"You've got a black eye," he told Sam.

Kelly liked that.

"I tell you, boy," he laughed, "I kicked the stuffin' outa your old man!"

"Not the last time!" Paul said.

Kelly laughed again. He brought Paul close to him, a big hand on either of Paul's small arms. "You been a good kid?" he asked. "Been mindin' your mom?"

Paul nodded. "Yes, sir."

"Atta boy! That big package's for you, then."

Paul looked to Sam for permission, and then he got the package and sat down on the floor with it. He pulled the paper away from a baseball bat, a mitt, and a ball. His eyes grew enormous.

"Thank you, sir!"

Kelly grinned at Sam. "If he ain't the politest kid —!" To Paul again: "That there package with the lump is for your sister — save it for her, huh? And the round one is for your dad, and the square one's your mom's. . . ."

Jill's present was a box of candy. "For beatin' up your old man," Kelly told her, a little red-faced. Sam's was a shirt, a wool shirt with a brilliant plaid. Sam put it on then and there. Paul looked at Sam and looked at Kelly.

"Twins!" he said.

The shirt was exactly like the one Kelly was wearing. Kelly said, uncomfortably, "They're good shirts, but they didn't cost nuthin'— I won 'em in a crap game."

Sam said, "I've lost a shirt or two shooting craps, but never one with a price tag on it —"

Paul went back to bed.

Before Kelly and Sam left for work, Kelly told Jill he'd park his car on the back street the next morning. "So I won't wake up you and the kids." He'd come through the empty lot to the front door, and Sam would let him in for a cup of coffee. Yes, and a nip, maybe, but a small one —

In the car, Sam opened his coat to the heater's warmth, slid comfortably down in the seat.

"How are the new men shaping up?"

"Not bad," Kelly said.

"Fire any?"

"I had to can a few — them that don't know nuthin', nor give a damn about findin' out. Most of 'em are doin' okay —"

"They got a good snapper, maybe?"

Soberly, Kelly said, "There's a hell of a lot to that. I got so I figure if they don't do it right, it's because I didn't tell 'em right. Like the other day. We was hangin' braces. 'I want them braces on the forty-five', I says. But when I come back, damn' if they ain't hung every which way." Kelly looked at Sam. "You know what a forty-five is?"

Sam said, "An angle of forty-five degrees."

"Sure. Only to them guys it's pure mud. So I don't get sore. I says, 'Tear 'em off, boys. You got 'em on the wrong slant. The slant I want is a forty-five, an' a forty-five is halfway between layin' down an' standin' up.'"

"Did they understand that?"

"Yeah." Kelly scowled then. "But I forgot to tell 'em right-handed. We hadda tear 'em off again —"

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II

Max Lessing appeared in the yard a couple of hours short of quitting time. He inspected the job with Kelly, and the stocky Irishman trotted to match Max Lessing's stride. Sam saw them on the river end of the new Whirley trestle, outlined against the sky. Lessing's head was bent; his hands were thrust deep in the pockets of his coat. "The King Louse!" Sam whispered in his mind. And then Tom Brownell came down the shipway carrying peevees and a maul.

"There's your friend," he said.

Sam Gallagher turned. "My friend?"

"Sure. The big boss." Brownie's slow grin spread across his face. "Ain't you the guy that eats with him? Come to think of it, this's the first time he's been here since you was out to his place. How come, Sam? Did you tell him you'd run the job?"

"Yes," said Sam. "Right into the ground."

He saw Max Lessing again, an hour later, sitting on a carbide can at the head of the shipway. Sam spoke as he passed in search of air-hose; he got a cheerful nod and a word of greeting in reply. He's just wasting time, Sam decided. Then he saw the blue smoulder of Lessing's eyes and felt the chill of warning. Something's slipped! he told himself. The guy's here for a reason!

And that was a pleasant thought with which to end the working day. Something had slipped! That might well mean word had come through — certain selected facts and dates from the fat dossier on file in Berlin. It had been two days since the dinner at Lessing's. Two days, and short-wave radio can span the world while a man draws one deep breath. Watch yourself, Gal-

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lagher! Sam thought. The peevees'll start comin' at you any minute now!

The whistle blew and he climbed the hill to the time office. He pushed the door open and grinned at Lea Damaron. "How's to ride to the hospital with you?" he said.

"As soon as I finish this report, Sam."

"I'll wait," he said. "Outside."

He was turning to go when he saw Max Lessing standing at the counter's end, not more than a dozen feet away. Lessing's hat was pushed up and back; the smile he had for Sam was wide. And yet — there was that ugly something in his eyes — something held back, hidden there.

"How'd she go today?" he said.

Carefully, Sam said, "Fine."

"I've been thinking about the things you told us the other night." Lessing turned his smile to Lea. "Time was when pilebucks couldn't read. Now, by the nine red dogs, we've got writers working for us. This guy wrote a book. Did you know that, Damaron?"

"Yes," said Lea. "And it was a good book."

Sam thought: Take a bow, Gallagher!

"And he's been in Germany," Lessing said.

Lea said, "So I've heard."

Sam Gallagher put his hands on the counter. There were others in the office now; Kelly, red-faced and sweating over his time-book; Nordstrom, the slim, brown lath of a man who pushed the second shift. Lessing's voice ran on, light and smooth.

"Gallagher's been every place," he said.

"No," said Sam. "There're spots I've missed."

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"I got a kick out of that Gestapo stuff," Lessing said. "Those boys really trust each other, don't they?"

"Not much," Sam said.

And he was sure Lessing's swift and careless talk was just a front — a screen behind which his real purpose lay. Sam tightened inwardly, waiting. Nordstrom left. Kelly frowned and wet a stub of pencil with his tongue. Brownie came in with a requisition for two ax-handles, and waited while Lea Dameron got them from a supply bin.

"They put a spy to work, then send a man to watch him," Lessing said. "Is that the way it goes, Sam?"

"That's close," Sam said.

"A spy to watch a spy. Pretty cutel!"

Sam said, "And it works damn' well."

Max Lessing chuckled. "It should."

His head came up; his eyes met Sam's. The ugliness was naked there. Lessing had said but little. He'd dropped a vague hint or two, a shadowy threat, and yet — Sam felt cornered now. It was as if the walls had moved up along well-planned grooves to pen him in. There was that in Lessing's eyes, in his savage smile, which said, "I know you now, Gallagher! I know just where you stand!" And desperately Sam thought back, seeking his mistake. Then Brownie brushed past him to reach the door. Then Max Lessing thumped his shoulder good-naturedly.

"I'll be seeing you," he said.

"I shouldn't wonder," Sam replied.

And Lea said, "We can go now, Sam."

They were caught in the off-shift traffic. Ahead, the line of cars stretched endlessly out of sight; behind, it

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spread into vast parking lots. It was thirty minutes of short stop-and-go, thirty minutes of mostly sitting. If you had anything to say this was the time for it, there was little else to do. But Lea Damaron was sober-faced and quiet. Too sober-faced. Too quiet. Sam fished a package of cigarettes from his pocket.

"Smoke?" he asked.

"Please."

He lighted it for her and put it to her lips. He waited, then, through another stop and another go. Lea smoked the cigarette and threw the butt away. But she'd found nothing to say, nor a reason to look at him. She turned onto a broad-paved thoroughfare that led across the river and into the West Hills. There was less traffic here. Lea drove smoothly through timed stop-lights. Sam saw a drugstore on his side.

"How about a cherry coke?" he asked.

Not that he had use for one. But there'd been a time, years before, when a cherry coke had been a ritual — an after school, after movie, after game excuse to sit and be together.

"With phosphate," Lea said.

They found a booth out of earshot of anyone. A languid waitress took their order. While they were waiting, Sam saw the clock above the magazine rack. One-thirty. There was a phone-booth in a corner.

"'Scuse it," Sam said. "I've a call to make."

He dialed Thane. The line rang once, opened.

"Gallagher," Sam said.

Thane was cool, distant. "You're late."

"Sorry. I couldn't make it sooner."

"But you're still alive."

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"Right now I am." He told Thane about Lessing. "He was up to something. Something big. I — well, I could feel it."

"Did he say anything definite?"

"No. But it was plain enough."

"You wouldn't be nervous, by any chance?"

"Of course not," Sam told him. "I shake like this all the time —"

Lea Damaron was swishing the ice in her drink. Sam sat down across from her and looked at his.

"I wonder if it's the same?"

Lea said, "The coke is the same."

"But nothing else?"

"Very little —"

Her head was bent and the light brought soft color to her hair, shadows to her cheeks. Sam wanted to touch her, but somehow he couldn't. She was troubled. That trouble was a barrier between them.

Soberly, he said, "Let's put it in words."

She nodded. "Let's —"

She was a moment, thinking. Then, quietly, "I want to ask you something, Sam." She paused. "In a way it's none of my business. But in another way it is. Because you're Sam Gallagher, you're my business and Jeff's. Whether we like it that way or not."

Sam said, "Go on."

"You're a phony, Sam. We know it, Jeff and I. We know you're up to something, but we don't know what — I mean, if it's good you're up to, or bad. Honestly, we hope it's good. But we don't see how it can be. All we can see is bad."

Deep inside Sam Gallagher there was a dry chuckle,

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and the dry thought: You don't know much, girl.

Aloud, he asked, "What do you know?"

"We'll skip that for now," she said. "Just tell me what you're doing, and we'll forget what Jeff and I have found out. We'll go on the same — only you'll have two helping you —"

And she added later, "If it's good."

"I'm afraid you've taken a wrong turn, Lea." Sam tried hard to sound convincing. "There's nothing to me but what you see — a pilebuck trying to earn a living."

She moved her shoulders in a faint shrug.

"That's it then —"

Lea was there, across the table from Sam, and she'd put this thing on the table between them. It was Sam's problem. She'd give him no more help. "Talk, mister, or let me go along —" In a few moments, she'd be gone from him. He could feel her leaving now, feel the slow coolness of her turning away.

"Lea," he whispered, "look at me —"

Her eyes came up. From a distance she searched his face, and her eyes were almost impersonal, she'd gone that far.

"Do you see a tramp?" he asked.

She saw his mouth, the deliberate strength in every line of it. She saw the recklessness in his face, and that quality of man that turns him brutal, at times unpitying. There was no worry in his eyes for sins done. No thought of payment. He had a to-hell-with-you set to his chin.

"You've done wrong before."

"In little things," he said.

Yes, she thought, in little things.

And she looked at him again.

That mouth, full-curving, hard — a strength for good as well as bad. The recklessness, the brutal quality, the lack of pity — these were not personal to him alone, but the inheritance of a male. What man could be a man, or fight and fight well without them? His eyes — be fair, Damaron — no worry there, no fear either. She decided, suddenly, that she liked the set of his chin.

Damaron, she thought, this is Gallagher —

Gallagher. The rough-looking kid who fixed your ankle the time you sprained it, who carried you six blocks home. "It ain't nuthin'," he told you puffing. "I could do this all day —" Whose car broke down, always, when you had your best dress on and high-heeled shoes. "It's not my fault — but I'll carry you home." That was five miles and he didn't make it —

Gallagher. The boy with the urge to travel. "Tell 'em I swiped the exam papers — I was leaving anyway —" Who believed in God, but wouldn't go to church. Who had a fine shoulder for weeping, and you wept there. "So you slipped," he told you. "So what? You sprained your ankle and got over it, didn't you? Sure, and you'll get over this. Forget it —" He took you then, and you held to the warmth of him, and the strength he had, and what he meant to you was more immense than living —

Gallagher. Across the table from her and here inside her, indestructibly in her heart forever. She bent her head, turning.

"Hey —" he whispered. "None of that —"

He was beside her, then, the hand that pulled her head up trembling. He touched her cheeks with a paper napkin. She tried a crooked little smile.

"I'm sorry, Sam."

"Am I in the clear?"

"With me you are." She moved her shoulders tiredly.

"But there's Jeff —"

Sam stood up.

"We'll see Jeff now."

There was a nurse in Jeff's room when Lea and Sam went in. A round, young girl, faintly Dutch-like, with yellow hair. She fussed about the room, straightening the bed, arranging a vase of flowers. Lea asked Jeff how he was, and Jeff said, "Fine —"

"He's not fine!" the nurse said. "He won't eat!"

Jeff winked at Lea. "I'm too fat now."

He'd lost weight, Sam thought. The brown weather-tan, always so much a part of him, had an odd transparency now. His eyes were darker, deeper-set, his hands were restless.

"Like the books?" Lea asked.

"Yeah. That Hornblower was quite a guy."

He looked at Sam's face. "Had another, eh?"

Sam nodded. "Kelly again."

"Run this time?"

"Nope."

Jeff's eyes opened a little. "So you licked him. How did he take it?"

"You know Kelly — he's the best friend I've got."

Jeff said, "If you've got a friend."

Jeff watched the nurse a moment, then spoke to her.

"Butter-ball, go tend your patients —"

She turned, a snap in her eyes.

"Don't butter-ball me, you bag of bones!" To Lea

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then: "If he doesn't start eating, I'll push him into the street!"

"I'll help you," Lea said. .

Jeff was quiet after the nurse was gone. He looked away from Lea and Sam, through the window where he could see a cornice of the building, part of a tree and a patch of sky beyond. There was a slow hardening to his lips, his hands became still, locked together.

Quietly, he asked, "Where were you married, Sam?"

Sam's mind thrust out far ahead. It was the home life he'd fumbled then, and not the work at the yard. Jill had been right. He remembered her saying, "We've got to decide a few things, like where we were married and when —" Too bad he hadn't.

"What difference does it make?"

"You told me London. Your wife told Lea Paris."

Sam looked at Lea sharply. Her eyes were bright and hurt; she'd caught her lips in her teeth, biting them. She nodded her head, and Sam's eyes went back to Jeff.

Carefully, he said, "We were married in London, flew that night to Paris. Jill loves Paris, likes to think we were married there. It's just a bit of a woman's pretending —"

"I never met Jill," Jeff said. "I want it understood I'm saying nothing against her. It's you I'm after." He shook his head. "But your story won't do. Alone it might. Put it with the rest and it means a hell of a lot. It means you aren't married."

"Easy, there —"

"We're having it out," Jeff said.

Sam swore to himself.

Then: "What's this 'rest' you're talking about?"

"For one thing, your being a pilebuck," Jeff told him.

"It's phony. You were tops in the newspaper business — I checked that through a newspaper friend of mine. He knew about you, but didn't know why you quit. But quit you did, for a lousy twelve dollars a day."

"Maybe I like it," Sam suggested. "Maybe I got tired of being shot at. A man could, you know."

Jeff's smile was thin. "Sam Gallagher?—no. But there's more. There's your kids. Lea saw them. They're fine kids, she says. But they aren't yours. Jill's maybe, but not yours."

Sam's eyes went to Lea. "What's this?"

Sharply, Jeff said, "I'll tell you. She was in love with you once, remember? When a woman loves a guy, she thinks about the kids they'll have — what they'll look like, how they'll act. A boy of yours would be a rough, tough kid. Get the idea?"

Sam cursed womanhood and the way they have of guessing things.

"Lea is right," he said slowly. "They are not my children. They're Jill's, and their father is dead. But as far as they know I'm their father — and neither you nor anyone will tell them differently."

"It won't do," Jeff said stubbornly.

The tautness of anger grew in Sam's throat. "Suppose it won't. Suppose you tell me what it means then."

"Two things," Jeff said.

He looked at his leg, thinking.

"I'm sorry it has to be like this. I'd like to be standin' where you could swing on me."

"I can wait."

"Here's one answer. You're draft age. You turn up with a wife and dependents. You want a job in defense."

"I'm a draft-dodger?"

"Or this. You spent a lot of time in Germany, didn't you? You talk German. And I remember, back in thirty-two, your beefing about the way the country was run, and getting tossed in jail for making speeches. Maybe I'm wrong and maybe not —, but since you took that job with me, we've had a lot of trouble in the yard —"

Sam went to the window. He put both hands on the sill and looked at the people on the sidewalks. Below, traffic had jammed at an intersection. A cop worked there, straightening it. Sam watched this and the people a long time. Until the tightness left his chest, until the blood stopped pounding in his neck and he could think again, clearly.

Then he turned.

Jeff's eyes were waiting. His face and hands were the color of ivory, and around his thin-pressed mouth he was whiter still. Lea's head was bent, but there was something terrible in the way her fingers gripped her purse. Sam thought it would be very fine if Jeff were standing where he could hit him —

But still, you had to admire the man. A job was a job, and no matter how dirty it was Jeff Gallagher did his jobs as he went along. He was proud, that guy. Anything he had was good, because if it wasn't he did something about it. You had to be good to be his brother. If you weren't, he did something about you. Sam felt a grin deep inside himself. The son-of-a-gun was all man. He'd throw his brother in the clink like a shot. What this country needed, Sam thought, was more Jeff Gallaghers, more brothers in the can —

"It's a wild pitch," he told Jeff.

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Jeff looked at Lea. "What do you call it?"

Her eyes lifted, then her head came up. She'd had a time of it, that girl, she'd been kicked around. It was in the white shape of her mouth, in the way she held her hands. There were tears, close by.

"I — I don't know," she said. "Honestly. I've been trying to think, but —" She tightened her grip on her purse. "Nothing makes sense. You sound right. But I can't believe Sam would —"

"But, Lea — the facts —"

She nodded unhappily. "I know. But sometimes they don't mean a great deal. To a woman, anyway. If she thinks enough of a man, that's all that matters."

Quietly, Jeff said, "Maybe you love the guy."

Her eyes went down. "Maybe I do —"

Sam caught his breath. "Lea —"

He looked from her bent head to Jeff. Jeff's face was turned to the window, his eyes were distant — somewhere beyond the cornice and the tree and the patch of sky. Nothing about him had changed. The line of his lips was inflexible still, his hands locked together. And yet he'd drawn away from them. Clearly. He'd left them together, as one might leave another on a street corner, turning wordlessly, striding into the night and carrying what he felt into the darkness with him.

Sam let his breath go.

Lea said, "Sam, will you go home —?"

Sam moved his shoulders.

"Jeff —"

"You'll hear from your draft board," Jeff said.

Sam turned away.

"Luck to you, boy —"

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It was clouding up when Sam Gallagher left the hospital, raining hard when he stepped off the bus three blocks from the house. Jill McCann met him at the door, met him with her hands on her hips and her gray eyes dark with exasperation.

"Where on earth is your rain-coat?"

Sam tipped his head forward, grinned at her through the water that spilled from his hat brim.

"It was spring when I left the yard."

He had a bath and a drink and dinner. "A heck of a time of day to eat dinner," he said. He helped Jill with the dishes. Gretchen had found a kitten somewhere and he admired that. He tried out the ball and bat with Paul in the basement. They broke a light globe and a window, and Jill called the game on account of bedtime —

"Your bedtime," she told Sam.

"Why mine?"

"You didn't sleep at all last night, remember?"

"'Snothin'," Sam told her. "I'm tough."

"That may be," Jill agreed. "But you're also a menace. Walking around with your eyes half shut — you might step on somebody —"

But Sam insisted on one more drink. A drink, a cigarette and a few moments of conversation. "You wouldn't deny me that?" Jill wouldn't. But first she'd put the children to bed. When she came downstairs again, Sam was on the davenport, relaxed, feet pushed toward the fire in the fireplace.

She sat down next to him and he gave her a lazy smile. He watched the fire. Presently, he said:

"Y'know, McCann, I've decided marriage is a fine institution."

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"Well — your mother would be glad to know that!"

"No, I'm serious." He waved his hand. "I mean, a home and having kids around — it's all right. A wife to worry about you, dinner all fixed, a davenport to sit on. A man's only half alive without them."

"You've discovered something."

His eyes came up. "Think so?"

She smiled at that. "Of course. Only you can't get a patent on it — it's been thought of before. By a man and a girl. He dragged her into a cave and said, 'Now cook and beget — for me and nobody else —' " She shrugged her shoulders. "That was a million years ago, but it's been going on like that ever since."

"Is that a fact?"

She nodded. "Some like it so much they get mad when it's taken away. Even fight, I'm told. Seems like I heard of such a fight recently. Some fellow claimed a man and a woman belong to the State and not to each other. So now they're fighting about it. Lots of people. Whole countries —"

Sam said, "I'll punch your nose."

Jill laughed.

After a moment, she asked, "What started this?"

Sam gave her a serious answer. "I'm thinking of getting married."

"Oh," Jill said.

She turned to the fire, put her elbows on her knees. Her face sobered, a new seriousness had drawn the line of her mouth firm.

"The pretty lady?"

"Lea, yes —"

Sam chuckled, smiling and remembering. He told her,

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II

then, about the afternoon. About Jeff and what Jeff thought of him and what Jeff was going to do. He told her about Lea Damaron.

"She didn't say she loved you," Jill pointed out.

"She said maybe. It's as far as a girl like Lea would go with a man she thinks is married. When this is over —"

"It will be over damned quick!"

And Jill McCann was furious, suddenly and completely. Hers was the anger of nerves worn thin. An accumulation of small things, no longer to be borne. She came to her feet, slim and taut. Her hands were fists at her sides, her eyes storm-ridden, dark.

"Sam Gallagher," she cried, "you're a fool!"

More than that, he was a senile old man, or a girl-crazy high-school boy. Maybe both. She'd tried to make this marriage of theirs convincing, and what had he done to help? Nothing — damn it, nothing! But with his chasing after women, with his fighting and drinking, he'd very near spoiled it all.

Sam lifted a protesting hand. "McCann —"

"It's true!" She stamped her foot.

He'd muffed the place of their marriage, hadn't he? And it was a fool's luck that Jeff had caught him and not Lessing. How on earth could he match wits with Lessing, if he couldn't make a simple thing like a make-believe marriage convincing?

"You can't!" she panted. "And Thane should know!"

"Tell him, then."

Sam Gallagher's face was wooden, his shoulders bunched and the hand that held his drink was white around the knuckles. She hated him, hated him all — the stubbornness of him, the set of his mouth, the eyes that

watched her as if she were a bug, squirming on a pin.

"You're a pig!"

He had a pig's sense of responsibility. He ate, he slept, he got drunk. The fact there were children dependent on him, children's lives, meant nothing. And what about her? She washed his sox, she fed his face, but he hadn't the decency to stay true to even a mock marriage. He couldn't keep his hands off other women. . . .

"That's enough!"

Sam was on his feet then. He caught her arms, and there was a rock-like strength in his fingers, gripping her; there was an anger of his own, pulling his mouth.

"Let me go!" she breathed.

He let her go. She stepped away, all the anger she'd ever felt in her eyes, in thin-flared nostrils.

"Damn you!"

She struck at him with an open palm and all her strength, struck out of fury and helplessness. His hand came up, caught her hand before it reached him. He held to it, pulled her close. She struggled, then was still. He looked at her. She looked at him. A grin walked slowly across Sam's mouth.

"What a wench!" he said.

Her lips were there, parted, breathing. He bent his head toward them slowly. It was plain he meant to kiss her. She made no move. He held one hand, the other was pinned by his arm around her. His lips came very close, almost touching. Then sharply, explosively, she tried to bite him.

He jerked away, spun her toward the stairs.

"Get to bed," he roared, "before I spank you!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

SAM GALLAGHER awoke in darkness. Jill McCann was kneeling beside the bed; her hand was upon his face. He stirred and would have spoken, but Jill's palm was across his mouth, warning him to silence.

"Sam!" she whispered. "They're here!"

She stood up then, dark-robed and small, the pale oval of her face framed by the loose shadow of her hair. He thrust his hand up beneath the pillow. His gun was there — an Army issue .45 automatic. It was a black and wicked glinting in his fist as he threw the covers aside.

He whispered, "The kids —"

"Sound asleep, Sam."

"Good. Wait in the hall."

She moved away with only the liquid rustling of her robe to mark her going. He dressed swiftly — sweat shirt and trousers. He found his slippers, then decided not to wear them for the leather heels would make a noisy clattering on the floor. Barefooted, the gun thrust in his waist-band, he crossed to the window. He lifted the edge of the shade to peer out and down. The lawn was a sweep of darkness; the trees and shrubs were thick lumps of black. Faint wind sighed. A branch rattled against the siding of the house — the tap of wooden fingers, loud across the taut, unbreathing silence.

Jill was waiting outside the door, her head bent, her hands in the pockets of her robe. *Fists*, he thought, *with cold sweat on the palms*. He could not see her face, and

yet he knew the pinched, white look was there — strain lines about her mouth — her eyes quick and wary. But she was cool, as the good ones are when the need for coolness comes. Tight-drawn, her fear a small, unheeded cry.

"I heard a car pass, come back, then pass again." Her voice was a soft-pitched whisper, clear and steady. "A man went past the house — three times."

"A drunk. Lost, perhaps."

"He came on the porch. On the lawn."

"I'll handle this. Go back to bed."

"No."

"Then wait in the children's room."

"No," Jill whispered, "I can't!"

He weighed the gun in his hand, checked it out of habit and by sense of touch alone. Full clip. It slid home with an oiled, metallic snap. Safety off. Hammer back — He listened, feeling the slow, uneven thud of his heart-beats.

"They won't come in," he said.

"Are you sure, Sam? Are you —"

Softly, he said, "I'm sure."

The doors downstairs were locked, front and back, bolted from the inside. The windows were all down and fastened; the shades were drawn. Even the cleverest man must make a noise to force a door or window lock. So that was out. They were too old at this sort of thing to throw their men away.

"I'll look around," he said.

One of the children stirred, muttering a wordless something in a voice thick with sleep. His nerves jumped at the unexpected sound. He heard Jill's sharp intake of

breath. And he waited through perhaps a dozen seconds of utter quiet.

She whispered, "Gretchen —"

"A bad dream, Jill. That's all."

He left her side, moving across cold floor. He went down the stairs. He held himself close to the wall, trying to remember which step always squealed beneath his weight. The lower hall was black. He went on to the archway and waited there until the soft, protesting creak of wood told him Jill had reached the bottom of the stairs.

On his left, in the dining room, the glow of a distant corner light seeped in around the blinds, edging them in silver. Sam crouched, spotting the position of the table and chairs against that faint radiance. Jill came softly to his side.

He touched her arm. "Down!"

She obeyed and he whispered, "Wait. In the corner here. I'll be back —" She gave him a silent nod; her hand found his in a brief, reassuring touch.

He went into the kitchen, the breakfast room. He paused to listen. A branch scratched the window screen; the refrigerator made its quiet humming. He checked the back door. Locked. He turned up the edge of the blind. Nothing moved in the dark world outside the glass.

He went on, swiftly now. Dining room. Living room. He unlocked the front door, and the brazen snap of the tumbler seemed as loud as a gun-shot. The porch was empty and dark. Tall shrubs stood between the corner light and the door — a wedge of black shadow made a path across the porch. Sam Gallagher slipped out into the night, bent low, the gun ready in his hand.

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The cement floor of the porch was smooth and icy. There was no sign of movement on the lawn. The walk was wind-swept and empty. But there was a car parked across the street, under the low-hanging trees. Its nose was pointed up the hill; he could see the vague glimmering of light on the chrome of its radiator fittings. Sam waited through a long moment. Another. The chill breath of the wind on his face. And he heard dim sound that might have been the creak of automobile springs, or the snick of a door latch.

He went back into the house. Then, because he did not want to risk the thud of the bolt shooting home, he fitted the night chain in place. Jill was waiting where he'd left her. Sam Gallagher knelt at her side.

"The car's across the street," he said.

"Did you see —"

"Nothing," he said. "Not a soul."

"Someone came on the porch — tried the door."

He said, "You're sure of that?"

"Yes, Sam. Very sure."

He was quiet then, his mind busy. What was it Thane had said? "Face this, Sam. If you stay here, if you go on working in the yard, you will live no longer than it takes Lessing to get word from his superiors!" So there it was! Somehow word had reached Max Lessing; must have reached him —

And now Sam Gallagher was through. No matter what happened here, he was through! His usefulness was ended. He'd made a mistake — tried to force things, and he had bloody well blown the show. There was a bitter thought. He'd tried too hard. He'd brought danger home to Jill, to Gretchen, and to Paul.

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"What can we do?" Jill whispered.

Sam replied, "I'm not sure — yet."

He couldn't call Thane. There was still a chance Thane, working under-cover, would find a way to stop Max Lessing, Parrish, and the others whose names they did not know. But if Thane appeared here, if he was seen and recognized, even that slim chance was gone.

"The police?" Jill asked softly.

He shook his head. "No, McCann."

There was no way to warn the police, no way to explain that the men who waited in the dark and silent car were old in the trade of sabotage and death. So the call would be only routine to the police. They'd expect to find a sleeping drunk, or a couple of kids using West Cherry Drive as Lover's Lane. A prowler car would pull up. A bored cop would saunter into the shadow, his holster flap buttoned down —

"I'll go out —" Sam began.

The quiet was broken then, smashed by the shrill and endless ringing of a bell. Jill McCann started suddenly; her hands caught at Sam's arm. "Steady!" he said, and his voice was tight. "That's the alarm clock, McCann. It'll run down in a minute."

"I — I forgot the darn thing."

He said, "So did I."

"Do you think they heard it?"

Wryly, he said, "How could they miss? That gadget is louder than Gabriel's trumpet."

She whispered, "What now, Sam?"

"We'll make them think we're getting up," he said. "I'll turn on the light in the upper hall, the one in the bathroom. They heard the alarm; they know we're

awake. If we turn on a few lights, we can sell them the idea we've just hopped out of bed."

"And then —"

"We'll improvise as we go along."

He left her to climb the stairs. He pressed the switch in the upper hall, blinking against the glare. He got his slippers from the bedroom. He switched on the bathroom light. Downstairs again, he found Jill McCann had not moved from her corner. The face she turned to him was white and worn; she pushed her hair away from troubled eyes. He grinned down at her.

"Nice seeing you again," he said.

She tried to smile. "Isn't it."

He went into the living room. There he tipped the shade of a reading lamp, turning it up so the full white brilliance of the light fell across the front door and windows. "That'll give the boys something to think about," he said, inspecting his work. "And now we can move without having our shadows on the blinds."

Jill McCann said, "Yes?"

"We've got until three-thirty — that's a half hour." His hand went to the gun in his waist-band. "They won't expect me to leave for work until then; they'll wait that long." He paused, eyes dark with thought. "And I think I know how Thane can give us a hand."

The telephone was in the kitchen, one equipped with a long cord. Sam Gallagher brought it into the hall. He dialed and waited until the line opened.

"Gallagher," he said then.

Thane's voice was cool. "Yes."

"The cat's out of the bag!" Swiftly, Sam sketched the

situation. "So they're out front," he finished. "My guess is they're the same boys who waited for McWhitty."

Thane said, "They move fast."

"That they do. How about some sirens?"

"What have you in mind?" Thane asked.

"We're mouse-trapped here. If you can send a siren or two out this way, I think our friends will get a little restless. I think they'll decide to wait and try again another day."

"Yes," said Thane. "They might."

"Tell the police it's a practice run. Tell —"

And Jill McCann cried, "Sam!"

He came around instantly, the gun a black shining in his fist. There was a look of utter horror on her face. One hand had gone to her mouth; the other came up to point. He said, "What —" And then he saw the bright flare of headlights cross the drawn blinds of the kitchen. Lights that blinked out, even as he watched.

"Kelly!" Her voice was strangled and low. "It's Kelly, Sam! He said he'd take you to work. He said —"

"Great God! I —"

And Sam Gallagher ran. He reached the back door, flipped the bolt, and yanked it open. He gained the back porch only to find Kelly had rounded the house from the other side. Sam Gallagher slammed back through the kitchen. He butted the swinging door aside, scrambling for the short entrance hall. Panic had him now — his throat was cold with it, tight with it.

A soft voice said, "Hey, Sam!"

Kelly was on the front porch. He had tried the door — it was open the length of the night chain. "Down!" Sam Gallagher snapped. "Get down, man!" But Kelly did not

move. His face was visible through the narrow crack, puzzled and frowning.

"Down!" Sam panted. "On your belly, man!"

Kelly said, "What the hell's wrong?"

"Don't ask questions! Get down — quick!"

Sam grabbed at the night chain. The gun got in the way; he switched it from right to left hand. Then Kelly's weight came against the door, pulling the chain tight again, jamming the slide in its groove. Sam drove his shoulder into the wood.

"Jill!" he called. "The light —"

He heard her move as the chain came free. He had the door open then. Kelly was a full arm's length away — half turned as though to leave the porch. His mouth jerked; his voice was rough.

"You got a gun. What do you need with —"

"Inside," Sam Gallagher said. "Quick, man!"

And afterward it seemed that single second — that whisper of time — went endlessly on and on. Impatience was a hoarse roaring in Sam's mind, a great voice shouting: "Now! Now!" He caught Kelly's arm and Kelly spun, wonder stamped deep upon his face. His red hat bounced away, fell. Sam pulled him through the door. Somewhere there was brittle sound — small and unimportant — a thin and ruddy wink of flame. And then the lamp went over with a splintering crash.

"Kelly!" Sam said. "Are you okay?"

The two of them were jammed together, hard against the corner of the hall. And there was light enough — from the stair-well, from the kitchen — for Sam to see Kelly's face. If Kelly spoke the words were lost in the

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growl of motor sound from the street outside. But his lips moved, fumbling with a smile.

"Man!" A crazy feeling of relief swelled up in Sam Gallagher. "We made it, Kelly. We got through!"

Kelly said, "Sam, boy —"

And blood came with the words.

The full weight of the man was on Sam's shoulders, on his arms. Slowly and carefully, Sam eased him down to the floor. He knelt beside Kelly and Jill slipped past them to close the door. Almost at once, she was back.

"Sam, is there anything I can do?"

He shook his head. "No, not a thing."

She asked a question with her eyes.

"They killed him," he said, his voice gone wooden. "They saw that shirt; they thought it was mine." He let his breath go in a ragged sigh. "Whoever does their gun work is very good, McCann."

"Damn them!" she whispered. "Damn them all!"

He looked at her, his eyes lost and bitter. "Damn me, while you're at it, McCann. This is my fault." He slanted his head at the stairway then. "We wouldn't want Paul to see this. You'd better go up and stay with the children in their room. Lock the door."

She said, "Yes, Sam."

The telephone lay where it had fallen from his hand. The receiver brought the soft hum of an open line. Sam wet his lips. "Gallagher speaking," he said. "Are you still there?"

Quietly, Thane said, "Yes, Sam."

"You can skip the sirens. Kelly came to take me to work. He landed on the front porch, wearing a shirt like

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II

the one he gave me. They shot him from across the street."

"What about you? And Jill?"

Sam set his teeth. "We're fine."

"Hang on. I'll be right out."

Daylight was an hour old when they left the house on West Cherry Drive. A chill and rowdy wind whooped in the streets, a boisterous wind heavy with stinging rain. Sam Gallagher drove James Thane's big coupé. He was smooth-shaven and dark-clad now; he had little to say as they crossed the city.

"You take this hard," Thane said.

"Kelly was one of the better guys."

"I'm sure he was. I'll take your word for that." Thane turned to look at Sam. He lifted one gloved hand, let it fall. There was a vague tightening at the corners of his mouth; his eyes were old and very kind. "It's unfortunate Kelly was caught in — well, call it a cross-fire. He was a friend of yours. An outsider. He had no part in this. But, Sam, in our rotten job things do go wrong. Always. And you know that."

"This time it was my fault."

"No, Sam. You did your best."

"That's the crux of it," said Sam. "My best was not good enough." His voice was stiff — the stiffness of jaws set tight. "I messed it up. I muffed the show. So all right! Let's leave it there."

"Very well," said Thane quietly.

He took a watch from an inner pocket. He held it carefully in his cupped hand — a watch old-fashioned in

design. Beautiful, though not wafer-thin and exquisitely cased. A fine and delicate mechanism for the precise keeping of time.

"Seven twelve ten," Thane said.

"We have eighteen minutes left."

"Seventeen minutes and fifty seconds."

Sam Gallagher rubbed mist from the windshield. Another day that fussiness, that prim correction over a matter of seconds, would have been good for a laugh. Or a crack of some kind. Now it was simply Thane speaking — the deft and accurate Thane, who made no mistakes. So okay! So— He became aware of Thane's sidelong and waiting glance then. And slowly realization came. Thane had thrown him that line deliberately as a cue — as an opening for a gag. He thinks I've gone overboard, Sam thought. He thinks a laugh will keep me from cracking up.

"Ten seconds," he said. "Who cares? No, don't tell me. I know. I would — if I was going to be hung!"

James Thane chuckled.

There it was. Sour and flat. But out of the way, at least, and he could give his attention to the wind and the rain-swept streets. Odd, the way Thane was acting now. Trying to be nice. Sure! Trying to help a man over the jumps. In a cock-eyed way that didn't fit. But when you thought about it awhile, it wasn't so odd. People always made a holy show of weddings and funerals, of birth and death. Especially death. Long faces and longer looks. You could almost see them wondering if your mind was full of pictures, if you were remembering the guy who was gone: his cocky, to-hell-with-you grin, the smooth and easy way he'd moved, or that whistling hook of his

coming around to slam you in the teeth. And you did remember — but only a little. Mostly you were numb and empty. Tired. You did not want to think. You'd go on and do your job. You'd cover Thane's back now. And in your mind you nursed the hope that somewhere — please, God! — you'd see the face of the one who'd stood under the trees of West Cherry Drive — see it plainly, caught behind the bead of a foresight. And held there through a slow and deliberate squeeze-off.

Thane said, "You're driving too fast."

"Sorry," Sam said. "What's the time?"

"Seven twenty-one thirty."

They were in the hills now, climbing above the city. Thane still cupped the watch in his right hand. A map lay open on his right knee.

"Turn left at the next corner," he said.

The street climbed steeply, angling away from the boulevard. They topped a low hill. Here the street ran straight to the greater hills beyond. Thane leaned forward. "We should be within three blocks of it," he said. "That white house on the corner. Right?"

"Check," said Sam.

"This will do nicely. Under the trees."

Sam Gallagher swung the wheel, touched the brake. The coupé eased to a stop against the curb. Thane folded the map. "Perhaps you'd better inspect one of the rear tires, Sam," he said. "It might be wise."

"Check," Sam said again.

He flipped his collar up and got out in the rain. Taking pliers from the tool compartment, he crouched beside the left rear wheel, seeming busy there. This, too, he would have laughed about on another day. Now he did

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as he was told, moving slowly to pass the moments. Now he thought: no wonder the guy is good. He doesn't overlook a thing!

Softly, Thane said, "It's time."

"Coming," Sam replied.

He drove the remaining three blocks in silence. Thane put his watch away. He checked the clip of a .38 automatic, and stowed it in his top-coat pocket. He nodded then, and they went up the walk together.

James Thane rang the bell.

Sam Gallagher moved to the right where he could watch both the street and the door. A black sedan came down the hill, made a leisurely turn, and parked on the side street. A block away, a delivery truck stopped and a slim man got out and raised the hood.

Sam Gallagher said, "They're placed."

"Good," Thane murmured.

And there was nothing in his face to tell of his thoughts. He held himself well, slim and very straight, his stick in one hand, neat black bowler in the other. He looked up as the door opened.

"Mr. Lessing," he said. "Mr. Max Lessing?"

Lessing said, "Yes. But I don't think—"

The words were the proper words, his voice held just the right note of polite wonder. He smiled, a big man who wore well-pressed, well-tailored blue. There was a carnation in his lapel; he had a napkin in one hand. It was a good twenty seconds before he saw Sam Gallagher.

"Well!" he said heartily. "Hello—"

Sam Gallagher did not answer. There were only small sounds to break the silence: the rough voice of the wind,

the whimpering rush of water in a down-spout close-by. Max Lessing's hand tightened on the door-knob. His eyes flicked back to Thane — wary eyes, suddenly dark with thought. His wide smile had an odd, stiff look.

He said, "What do you want?"

"You," Thane replied.

"Me?" Lessing's mouth twitched. "Why me?"

"That will be explained," said Thane, "later."

"Do you mean this is an arrest?"

"Call it that," said Thane.

Muscles bunched at the angle of Lessing's jaw. His eyes had turned narrow; his smile was gone. He sent a long glance beyond Thane to the street.

"The truck and the sedan are ours," Thane said. "There's another car covering the back of the house."

"I have a right to know what this is about," Max Lessing said hoarsely. "Yes, and a right to know who you are. Where's your warrant? Where're your credentials?"

Thane's thumb was on the brim of his bowler hat. He pressed down and the hat tipped slowly up, lifting as a trap door lifts. Max Lessing stared as though unable to pull his eyes away. Thane's gun was beneath the hat, pointed squarely at Max Lessing's stomach. Thane let Lessing look at it, then dropped the hat again.

"My card," Thane said.

"Good God!" Lessing said. "You can't —"

The hall 'phone rang shrilly then. Lessing turned that way, turned back. His face was the color of putty; sweat beaded his upper lip.

"That will be one of your friends," Thane said quietly. "O'Day, or perhaps Mr. Parrish, calling to say visitors have arrived and are now kicking the door down." He

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II

bent his head. "If you're quite ready, Mr. Lessing, we'll be on our way."

"What are you going to do? Where are —"

Thane said, "You'll know very soon."

Max Lessing came out on the porch and closed the door, moving woodenly as though walking in his sleep. He looked down at the napkin still in his hand; he opened his fingers and let it fall. "You'll pay for this," he said, but his voice was empty of belief.

By noon the rain had stopped, though the wind held strong. A strip of blue sky appeared along the horizon. "Enough," a newsboy told Sam Gallagher, "to make shirts for the whole Navy —" Further along, at the bus stop, a slender girl said, "It's spring again," and smiled as though sharing a secret.

"Let's send it back," Sam said.

The girl sobered. "But why?"

"Sorry," he said. "Don't mind me."

The bus came and he climbed aboard. He felt old and tired. He didn't want to talk; his face was stiff with a long-held frown. Spring, he thought, and the word was bitter in his mind. Now Hitler's boys will begin to roll — now the Russians will catch hell —

He left the bus at West Cherry Drive. The kids were out in noisy strength here, wind-whipped color in their cheeks. A Scotty pup sniffed suspiciously at Sam's trouser leg and then bounced away, his duty done. Sam went up the walk to reach the porch. He thought of Kelly there — his red hat, wide grin, rough, deep laugh. And he made a fist of one square hand, swallowing against a sudden tightness in his throat.

PILEBUCK

II

Jill McCann let him in.

"Thane sent me home," he said.

She nodded. "I know. He called."

The floor of the entrance hall was bare now; the small rug gone. A stocky man waited in the living room. He smiled at Sam. "McCann saw you on the walk, sir," he said. "That's why I didn't cover the door."

"Anything happen, Cole?" Sam asked.

"No, sir. Not a thing."

"Okay," said Sam. "You can go out and get your lunch. There's no special hurry about getting back."

He stood at the window then, sunlight on his face. He watched Cole go down the street with a quick and jaunty step — one of the clean-cut boys, one of the bright young men. "You'd think he was hurrying off to the wars," Sam said. "With a couple of worlds to conquer before dinner-time."

Jill said, "I felt better with him here."

"That's why Thane borrowed him from the F.B.I."

Jill's eyes were grave. "You're tired, Sam."

"A little," he admitted.

"How — how did it go?"

He dropped his hat and coat on the davenport. He took a cigarette from a box on the table, and then held it unlighted in his hand. "It came off beautifully," he said, "— like everything Thane plans. We got Lessing. The other boys picked up O'Day and Parrish, and a couple of men who were in Parrish's apartment."

"So it's all over?" Jill said.

He nodded carefully. "It looks that way."

"Then why did you tell Cole to come back?"

"You're sharp today, McCann." He tried for easy

heartiness, and missed. "I've got to go out this afternoon. I don't want you and the kids to be here alone. It's not Lessing's crowd. It's just — well, someone might have heard the shot last night, in spite of the noise the car made. Or they might have seen the boys take Kelly out the back—"

Softly, she said, "Stop it, Sam."

"So I can't even sell you?" A crooked grin pulled at his lips. "The truth is we're not sure it's over. So we can't take chances. Thane's moving you and the kids out today or tomorrow. Till then, he wants a man in the house. Just in case."

"Thanks, Sam. I like to know the score."

He lit his cigarette. "Where're the kids?"

"I was coming to that." She was frowning, concern dark in her eyes. "Gretchen's taking a nap, in my room. But Paul — Sam, I think you'd better talk to Paul."

"Talk to him? Why, McCann?"

"He was awake when you sent me up to his room. He's stayed there all day. He asked about Kelly."

Sam let his breath go. "Good Lord!"

He took the stairs two at a time. Paul's room was dark; the shades were drawn. Paul was sitting on the edge of his bed, small and very still. He held something in his lap; he did not look up when Sam came into the room.

"Paul," Sam said. "Hi, fella."

"Hello, Mr. Gallagher."

Sam moved across the room. He sat down on the floor in front of Paul. He could see the boy's face; could see what Paul held upon his lap — a baseball bat, a ball,

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a glove. His presents! The things Kelly had given him the day before. Sam Gallagher swallowed.

"Is Mr. Kelly here, Gallagher?"

Sam said, "No. No, Paul, he's not."

"He told me he'd come home with you."

"I didn't work today," Sam said.

And he bent his head, not wanting to meet Paul's eyes. He watched Paul's hands. The boy touched the catcher's mitt — man size, that mitt, and the best money could buy — stroking the smooth leather with his fingertips. He moved and the ball rolled off his knees to thump upon the floor.

"I had a secret with Mr. Kelly," he said.

Sam wet his lips. "A secret, Paul?"

"I don't suppose he'd mind if I told you. I'd have to tell you anyway. Mr. Kelly asked me to go to the cinema with him, to a baseball picture. He said we would go today, if you thought it was all right. And we shook hands. But he didn't come—"

Sam picked up the baseball and rolled it between his palms. "Mother tells me you didn't sleep last night."

"I heard Mr. Kelly's car out back."

Softly, Sam said, "Anything else?"

"Some talking. And some men were here. But that was after Mother came up to stay with Gretchen and me."

"It was pretty noisy." Sam traced the seam of the baseball with his thumb, wondering how much the boy knew, or guessed. "Paul," he said, "how would you like to see that baseball picture with me?"

"The secret was with Mr. Kelly."

"I'm afraid he can't come. You see, he was —" And

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Sam bogged down, for suddenly there were no words. Death. How do you explain that to a child? How can you put it in a sentence for a grave, sober boy who's older than his years? How can you say his friend has gone? "Kelly won't be back," he said at last. "I'm afraid that's the way it is."

He touched Paul's hand. The boy's small fingers were cool against his palm. Motionless. The long pause held. A car went by in the street outside; somewhere close-by children ran and yelled in noisy play.

"Like Tony," Paul said.

Sam turned the name in his mind. *Tony?* And then memory snapped clear for him. Tony, Paul's brother, the boy who'd blistered his hands digging trenches and air-raid shelters in St. James's. The boy who'd joined the R.A.F. as soon as they'd have him, who'd flown a Spitfire. And who'd died over the Channel, shot down in flames.

"Yes," Sam said. "Like Tony."

Paul's fingers closed on Sam's hand, squeezing down. His lips trembled but no sound came from him. His face was white; his head high-held. *He can't cry*, Sam thought. *It would be better if he could.*

There were soft steps in the hallway then. Jill McCann appeared in the bedroom door. "The hospital just called," she said. "Jeff wants to see you, Sam."

Sam Gallagher said, "Right."

But he did not move, did not take his eyes from Paul's small face. "Hang on!" he whispered in a low and husky voice. "Hang on, Paul!"

He got to the hospital just before two o'clock. The

girl at the reception desk smiled at him and he bent his head in reply. He rode the elevator and went down the hall, his rough-hewn face impassive, a cold pipe clenched between his teeth.

Jeff lifted a hand in greeting.

"I hear you want to see me," Sam said.

"That's right." There was something odd about Jeff's grin, a kind of shy embarrassment. "I got a wire today. I thought you ought to know." He took a sheet of paper from the bedside table. "Here. Read this."

Sam pocketed his pipe. "Sure."

The message was short. "Careful investigation convinces us Sam Gallagher not a draft dodger or a spy." And it was signed: "Davis. F.B.I."

"I phoned the draft board yesterday," Jeff said. "Just after you left. The wire came a couple of hours ago. It made a sucker out of me." He nodded at his leg, huge in its plaster cast. "This gadget ties me down. But I tried to come looking for you anyway. It took a nurse and two internes to talk me out of it. I mean that, Sam."

And he did, for that was Jeff Gallagher. He would finish whatever job he started, no matter what the cost. If you made a mistake, he told you that. Get tough and he'd get tougher. If you rated praise you got that too. Straight from Jeff — from headquarters. And if he was wrong, he'd come and tell you so, in the plainest words he knew. *No wonder men will break their backs for him!* Sam thought. *No damned wonder!*

Jeff said, "I want to apologize."

"Because you got a wire?" Sam asked.

"No." Jeff's hands were brown against the sheet. restless there. "That wire came through in a little more than

twelve hours. Not even the F.B.I. can thoroughly investigate a man's background in that short a time." He grinned. "So they knew you, Sam. How else could they have wired so soon? They say you're not a draft dodger, not a spy. All right. I know you're not a pilebuck. Not that alone. So what's left? The F.B.I. knows you — it comes back to that. Sam, boy, you're not working against them. You're on their side!"

"You could be wrong," Sam Gallagher said.

"I could be," Jeff replied. "But I'm not."

The plump and friendly nurse came then, the Dutch girl with the yellow hair. "Open wide," she said, and tucked a thermometer under Jeff's tongue. She smiled at Sam. "He's nearly well," she said. "I know because he's cranky all the time."

Jeff mumbled, "Butter-ball, I'll whop you."

"Wait till you've got two sound legs," she advised pleasantly. "You'll want to run when I start swinging." She noted something on the chart, then turned to Sam. "Yell if you can't handle him. I'll come and help."

"It's a deal," said Sam. And when she'd gone, he added, "That's a nice nurse you've got, Jeff."

"If you like 'em big, an' I don't." Jeff sobered then. "Comes now the hard part, Sam. There's one other thing I've got to straighten out. I jumped you the day you came to work. I got nasty because you didn't write Mom."

"Yes," said Sam, "you did."

"I cabled you while Mom was sick. Twice." Jeff smoothed the sheet beneath his hands. "I wrote a letter after — she died. Will you tell me when you got those two cables, Sam? And when you got the letter?"

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"In June. In '39."

"All of them? At the same time?"

"They had a little trouble finding me. I was in the hospital then, and it — well, it was just one of those things." His voice was quiet; he did not look at Jeff. "They all caught up with me at once — the cablegrams and the letter. I read the letter first."

"And she'd been dead three months."

Sam nodded. "Something like that."

"Lord!" Jeff's hands squeezed into fists. "I'd crawl under a board if there was one around. I'd just seen Mom die when I wrote that letter; I was mad clear through." He paused, misery in his eyes. "I don't know why you didn't smack me that day in the tool-house, Sam. I rated a goin' over, if ever a man did!"

"That wouldn't have helped."

"I suppose not," Jeff said. Then, "I'll square this with you somehow, Sam. I swear I will."

"You have."

"I've got a hunch there are a lot of questions you can't answer. Can you tell me when you'll be leaving?"

"Soon, I think."

"I'm not surprised." Jeff's head came up. His eyes were shining now. "I'll be sorry to lose you, Sam. You're a good pilebuck. You've got a job with me, if ever you need work. Remember that, Sam."

"I will, Jeff. And thanks."

Jeff thrust out his hand. "Good luck."

"Thanks again," Sam said.

And he felt warm and proud all the way down the hall. There was a man, that Jeff! When he said you were good it meant something. . . . Sam frowned then. Jeff

had not mentioned Lea Dameron, or Jill. Perhaps that was because he'd guessed the marriage was only a part of Sam's job. Sure! And this, all of it, was Jeff's way of saying, "May the best man win —"

Sam Gallagher stood a moment at the curb outside the hospital. The taxi stand was empty. He whispered, "Dammit —" tiredly, and wondered where they all went to when you needed them. Turning, he followed the sidewalk down the hill.

The day was good again. Good, with a sun-splashed warmth and the smell earth has after a long winter rain. Cartagena was like this — earlier in the year, of course. He remembered, then, that Spain was hungry. Hungry — Well, if a man had to starve to death, it would be a comfort to have a warm sun on his back.

He reached Thane's office an hour later, having walked all the way. He carried his coat and hat. His collar was unbuttoned, and in him there was no regret for the hour lost. An hour for Gallagher. Ducking, he thought, and what of it? From here on he'd have no chance for ducking. From here he took it on the chin.

There were three men with Thane.

"This is Colonel Towne," Thane said. "You know him."

"I know him," Sam said.

The way you know the General Manager or the Divisional Superintendent. You see him once a year, maybe, but if things go wrong you see him oftener. He was as tall as Sam, though slim and bony. He had a long nose, white hair and very sharp brown eyes. Not shrewd or canny — friendly eyes, so damned intelligent they scared you.

"You're looking fit, Sam."

"I never felt better."

Thane said, "And this is Mr. Stone —"

Sam shook hands with Stone.

"— and Mr. Allen."

A couple of bright young huskies. F.B.I. And probably near the top by the look of them. Stone had freckles, a homely puss and a nice grin. Allen was good-looking and dark, as much your friend as anybody. Good eggs, both of them. College graduates with muscles. Sam wished he'd finished high school.

"I've read your work," Stone said. "That book on the Spanish War was especially fine." He smiled. "Too bad you couldn't have gone on with it —"

Allen said, "He's doing all right with Thane."

Thane laughed. "After reading one of his reports, you'd find *Blood and Wine* pretty slow going."

Soberly, the Colonel nodded. "For real shoot-em-up, smash-bang, I'll take the reports."

The old business.

Relax, Gallagher, Sam told himself.

He found a chair and got comfortable. This would be easy. They'd cut his throat and he'd feel no pain. He could shake his head, presently, and his head would roll off on the carpet, and that would be the first he'd know about it. Never, he thought, would it be done again by men half so gentle, half so deft.

Thane shuffled papers on his desk a moment, thinking.

"This is to be a report, Sam," he said finally. "A summary of the job for the benefit of the Colonel and Mr. Stone and Mr. Allen. The final accounting." He smiled. "Check me, will you?"

A report —

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Sam almost said, "I like 'trial' better, Thane. Trial — with the Colonel the judge, you the prosecution, and the F.B.I. the jury —"

He did say, "I'm with you, Thane."

"We began," Thane said, "with certain items of information. We knew there were foreign agents in the yard — Lessing, Simms, O'Day, Parrish and others." Sam made a mental note of the "others"; it would be important later. "We knew these men planned the destruction of the yard. We knew the approximate date the yard was to be destroyed."

"This week," said Sam.

"Or the first of next," the Colonel added.

Thane nodded. "So we had time at our disposal."

Time. Not quite two months. They had to know who the "others" were. That was the main job — to get them all. More than that, this made a fine test case. The methods used here by Lessing would be used in other yards by other men. This case would be, to the men who fought Max Lessing, what actual battle is to troops. They wanted, then, the experience and three specific facts: how Lessing would destroy the yard; the exact date of the destruction; the names of all his men.

"It was a tough assignment," Thane said.

You couldn't figure the thing on paper beforehand. You had to put a man in the field. You had to give him a free rein to solve his problems as he met them. A one-man job. He could have help, yes, but only at wide intervals, only when the situation became desperate. The success or failure rested on one man's shoulders.

Stone leaned forward, his freckled face earnest.

"That," he said, "would take shoulders!"

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Thane smiled at Sam.

"Fortunately, I had a fine pair."

See? Sam told himself. You can't feel a thing.

They'd provided Sam with a wife and children. Sam's brother had given him a job as a pilebuck. And Thane wanted the men to know that being a pilebuck alone was a job of proportions. He could hardly remember a day when Sam hadn't been battered up one way or another.

"Look at his ear," he said.

They looked.

"Someone did a job on it," Allen said.

"And Sam did a job —"

But first they'd have to look at the debit side of the ledger. The experiment had cost them most of what had occurred since they discovered Lessing was a foreign agent. If they had arrested him two months ago, none of this would have happened.

"That's not right," Stone protested. "We caught more men yesterday than you knew about two months ago. Three more. They'd have carried on."

"Perhaps," Thane agreed.

But they'd look at it Thane's way — Thane and Sam were not afraid of responsibility. And Sam had a dry smile for that. The experiment cost them, then: the three pilebucks who had died at the piling car; the Chinook's boom, the loss of the rig, and Jeff's injury; McWhitty killed; and Kelly killed —

Thickly Sam said, "That's paying high!"

The Colonel bent a sharp glance at Sam.

"Depends on what we got for it," he said.

"Nothing!"

Sam Gallagher came erect suddenly. His mouth was down at the corners, his face gone savage beneath his tan. "I struck out!" He wanted them to know that. As Thane said, he wasn't afraid of responsibility, and he hoped they weren't. He'd gone flat on his face at every turn. After two months, after five men killed, he had nothing to show —

"But calluses," he said bitterly, "and a tin ear!"

"That's not quite true."

Thane's voice was smooth and firm, and he spoke around Sam — to the Colonel, to Stone and Allen. And his expression seemed to say, "Sam is tired, gentlemen. Excuse him—" There was a gentle scolding in it for Sam himself. Sam sat back, biting his lips, sweating.

"He did a fine job," Thane said.

He had proved, for one thing, that the spy business was a closed corporation. They worked in teams. Combat teams. There'd be possibly six men to a unit. "Six experts in disaster," Thane said. Highly trained, closely knit, they were complete in themselves, self-sufficient. Should one be killed, they worked as five; two killed, they worked as four.

"They take no new recruits," Thane said.

"Good tactics," the Colonel agreed. "A new man would be poorly trained, untrustworthy."

"The point exactly," Thane said. "Sam proved that one of our men can't break into their circle. If he couldn't do it, no one could."

Thane mentioned the dinner at Lessing's, the plan Sam had thought of there. Stone laughed aloud at that. "A damned smart bit of finaglement," he declared. "Took guts, I'd say—" And Sam Gallagher pushed to his feet in

disgust. He went to the window and looked down into the street. Thane had more —

“Lessing’s turned State’s evidence —”

As Thane saw it, Lessing had been shaken by what Sam had done to him. Faced by the firing squad, he’d gone to pieces. He’d given them the names of his men, and he’d admitted they’d been sent there for the purpose of sabotage —

“Which closes the book,” Thane said.

“And balances it,” the Colonel agreed.

Sam Gallagher turned from the window.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “this is crap!”

Sharply, Thane said, “Sam —”

Sam stopped him with an outthrust hand, a hand stiff and white, as the cords of his neck were white and the corners of his mouth. He was sweating, now, sweating hard, though the room was cool. The shine of it covered his face; beads of it ran down his cheeks, down his throat and into his open collar. He wiped his forehead with his shirt-sleeve.

“Hear me out,” he said.

And they heard him — watched him with faces gone sober, with eyes cool and intent.

“I’m no good at subtleties —” he said.

He hadn’t the background for it, or the brains. To tell them the honest-to-God truth, he didn’t know if they were being kind to him or cutting his throat. But he did know they were ducking the main issue.

“And that’s a mistake,” he said.

It was no time for ducking. He wiped sweat from his eyes. No time for being kind to anybody. If he’d failed, they’d best know about it. And he had failed — the whole

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project had gone flat on its silly face. Dammit, couldn't they see it had? If they couldn't he'd show them. What had Thane said? — they'd wanted to know three things —

"Say them again, Thane."

Quietly, Thane said, "We wanted to know how Lessing would destroy the yard. The exact date of the destruction. The names of all men helping."

Hoarsely, Sam said, "Now give me the answers."

The men were quiet, uncomfortable.

Stone said, "There's Lessing's evidence —"

Sam put his hands on Thane's desk, held his weight on stiff arms and looked at them. His shirt was sweat-transparent now; there was more, glistening and wet, on his chin and throat.

"I know Lessing," he said. "He's a big man. He's tough and smart, and he's not afraid of me, or you, or a firing squad. If he made a confession, he had a reason. And he had a reason."

Thane said, "Sam —"

Roughly, Sam said, "You'll hear this!"

Thane lifted his shoulders to the Colonel in a helpless gesture. Sam should have known, then, but he didn't. He bulled through with what he had to say, his voice breaking on taut nerves.

"Lessing's told us nothing we didn't know. He gave us the names of his men — the ones we had in jail, and no others! He said their work was general sabotage. There's the answer. He's covering up. He wants the case closed. He wants the men still free to go on and finish what he started. They'll finish it. And it's not general sabotage. It's big. Damned big!" He broke off and wiped sweat

from his face again. "Dammit!" he said. "You've got to see it!"

Quietly, Thane said, "Sam, we do see it —"

"What's that?"

Thane lifted his hands. "We see it, Sam."

"You mean —"

And it got to Sam Gallagher, then, swiftly and completely, a simple truth — a hard fist, slugging at his middle. He felt himself shrink inside. He moved slowly to the window. The room was still, the men behind him waiting. Sam could feel them waiting.

You told them, he thought.

Sure, he'd told them — Gallagher, the bright boy. Good Christ! And he'd done a job of it. Telling Thane, telling the Colonel — when had he *ever* had an idea that they hadn't had a week before him. Of course they knew, and had known since Lessing wrote his confession. This meeting was a scheme of theirs, a build-up for Gallagher. And Gallagher had thrown it back at them. He'd hit them in the teeth with it, the way you'd hit a man with a ripe tomato.

Turning, he gestured limply.

"I told you I was no good at subtleties —"

"Don't blame yourself, Sam."

Thane was deeply earnest, leaning across the desk toward Sam. "Blame us — me — it was my idea. I'd forgotten something. Certainly, I shouldn't have. It's the biggest thing about you. Honesty. The bull-headed kind that makes you slam into your responsibilities —" He spread his hands. "Now it's my turn to be honest."

"We could start over," Sam said, wiping his throat. "This time I'll get my cues. I'll do it right."

"No, we'd better not."

"All right, then."

Thane's eyes were sharp. "Sam, you think you failed on this job."

"I did fail."

"You did all you possibly could."

"Sure. But a good man — Stone, here, or Allen — they'd have figured something different."

Stone's chuckle was dry. "Maybe Allen —"

"The point is," Thane said, "the job is done. Your usefulness is ended. You can't go on working in the yard; you're known there. You're going to take a rest, a long one. We wanted you to take it, feeling this job had been a success. We tried, perhaps not with truths, but at least with a reasonable facsimile."

"Thanks — thanks for that."

Sam's voice turned on soft bitterness, and the Colonel came erect, suddenly, his eyes hard.

"You had a job to do, Sam. A specific job. You did it. And that's as far as you need go. There are men — better able than you — to decide if the job was a success or failure. Men to take the responsibility."

"And I'll give it to them!" Sam's mouth was rough. "I'll give them three pilebucks, the ones the piling got, and they can be damned glad they didn't hear them yelling. I'll give them Kelly and the blood on my porch. I —"

Sharply, Thane said, "Sam!"

Sam broke it off.

"Kelly was working for us!" Thane said. "He didn't know it, but he was. For all of us — for you and me and the man on the corner. Call him a soldier. A soldier without a rifle. Say he died a soldier's death —"

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A soldier — Sam thought.

Kelly would like that. Red-faced Kelly, with a bear's shoulders and a Sunday punch that came down on you out of the sky. With the trim caulked shoes and the loud shirts. Hi, soldier! He'd be a little self-conscious about it. He'd have a silly grin on his puss, like the one he'd had when he gave Jill the box of candy. But he'd like it fine. He'd be proud. He'd do his best with it —

Sam said, "That's a good idea."

He looked at the Colonel, the angry roughness gone from his voice, the stiffness out of his shoulders.

"Maybe you could fix it. I mean for Kelly. A soldier's funeral. With a flag and a squad of soldiers and a volley. With a bugler playing taps. His friends — the pilebucks — wouldn't know what it meant. But they'd know he earned it. They'd know he'd done something big. Something for Uncle —"

The Colonel's eyes went to Thane, no longer hard, and back to Sam. Quietly, he said:

"I'll do it, Sam."

"Thanks. Thanks a lot —"

Sam Gallagher turned and picked up his coat. He moved toward the door, preoccupied, thinking. At the door, he paused, turning. His eyes went around the room. He looked at the floor near the chair he'd used; he looked under Thane's desk and in the corners.

Thane said, "What is it, Sam?"

Sam's grin was small and tired. "My head," he said. "It must be around somewhere —"

CHAPTER EIGHT

SAM GALLAGHER watched Jill McCann pack. He sat on the window seat in her bedroom, his arms around his pulled-up legs, his chin resting on his knees. There was little waste motion about McCann. She brought an arm-load of dresses from the closet; swiftly they were folded and stowed in her bags. She was very good at it, Sam decided. And wondered why his own suitcase looked, always, as if it had been packed by a drunken magpie.

She said, "What about your work-clothes?"

"Heave 'em out in the alley, McCann."

She frowned. "That's an awful waste."

"Then save 'em for your memory book," he said.

Jill McCann turned to look at him, brows arched. "You sound a little sour," she said. "What's the matter, Gallagher? Are you feeling sorry for yourself?"

"I was thinking, McCann."

"About the pretty lady?"

"There's one thing I like about you," he said, the wry, small grin she knew so well upon his lips. "You're consistent — consistently female." He stretched his legs along the window seat, fished for a cigarette. "Fact is, I was considering two items, and not doing very well with either. I was wondering what it would be like without you and the kids around —"

"It will be quiet," Jill said.

"And I was wondering," he went on evenly, "why the good Lord didn't give Gallagher a brain. I've come up

with some bad ones in my time, but the worst of the lot was trying to sell Lessing the idea I was playing on his team. That really wrecked the show."

"You did all you could, Sam."

"I should believe that." He rubbed a thumb-nail across his chin. "I've had it thrown at me all day — by experts! 'You did a swell job, Gallagher,' they said. 'You were right in there pitching all the time —'" His mouth pulled down. "That's nice talk, but it isn't true. I'm the guy who loused the works. In spades!"

Gravely, she said, "Sam —"

If he heard her he gave no sign. He was quiet, head canted, eyes fixed on the cigarette smouldering in his hand. *He can't let go*, Jill thought. *He can't stop thinking*— And for an instant she wanted to touch the tortured knots of muscle along his jaw, to smooth them with her fingertips. But he'd hate that.

She said, "I talked to Thane today."

His eyes came up. "When?"

"He was here while you were at the hospital." She went past him to the chest of drawers. "He came after Paul and Gretchen. They're at the hotel now, with Cole and a nurse." She turned, her hands laden. "We talked about the job and — about you."

"Gallagher on the front burner, eh?"

"Being bitter doesn't help, Sam."

"Right again," he said. "Go on, McCann."

"Mr. Thane was worried about you. He — well, he was afraid you blamed yourself for everything that's happened. He said you'd done a fine job, really. That he would try and show you that."

Sam Gallagher said, "He did."

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"But you don't believe him. Is that it?"

He looked at his cigarette and then at her. "They had it rigged when I got to the office," he said woodenly. "They gave me a nice build-up, a pat on the back. And they slid past the main issue very neatly. I was put in the yard to do a job, McCann. I flopped at it."

"That's not your fault, Sam."

He said, "I think it is."

She came to the window seat. "Slide over," she said, and when he obeyed she sat down there. "Go back to the beginning," she said. "You knew three names — Max Lessing, Parrish, and Simms. Your job was to try to work your way into their confidence, to become a member of their organization. Right?"

"That's the size of it," he said.

"You couldn't contact Lessing. Not at first. He was the General Manager; you were a pilebuck. You had to wait until he came to you. That left Simms and Parrish. You and Simms had met before." Her mouth tightened. "So that canceled out—"

"Thanks to McWhitty," said Sam.

"Then only Parrish was left."

Sam said, "And he'd have none of me."

"Of course not!" Her eyes sought his. "Now we know you had no chance with Parrish. None at all! You have proven these men work as tightly knit teams; that an outsider cannot possibly get in!"

"Say that's true, McCann. What then?"

"Not even the best strategist can draw a battle plan until he knows the enemy," she said. "Sabotage is as old as man, but this — the combat teams, the way they work — is streamlined and very new. You did the re-

search, the field-work, Sam. You brought home the facts. Now Colonel Towne and Thane can make a blueprint for the defense of other shipyards, factories, and motor-plants. So you've done your job and done it well. And the odds were all against you from the start." She tipped her head and smiled at him. "Thane's very proud of Gallagher."

"That's nice," he said. "Because I'm not."

"But I just told you why —"

"Your sales talk was a peach, McCann. As good as I ever heard." His mouth held the shape of a crooked smile. "For a minute there you had me sold."

"But not now?"

He shook his head. "Sorry."

Anger touched her then. She stood up, suddenly furious with his stubbornness. "You're sulking!" she said, and there was huge contempt in her voice. "And I know why. You wanted to be a Dick Tracy-Superman sort of fellow. Very dashing and rotten with glamour. You wanted to do this whole job yourself and have it end in a blaze of glory. With the Army, the Navy, and the Marines on stage for the Grand Finale. With bands playing and banners flying and medals all over your silly chest!"

"And a beautiful wench to kiss," he said.

"But it isn't done that way!" she cried. "And you should know it isn't! What about Thane, and the work he's done? What about the men who tapped the phone lines and opened the mail? What about the ground-work McWhitty did? You're not alone in this, Sam Gallagher! Even Paul and Gretchen did their part. It's the sum that counts. All the little pieces, all the facts and details,

must be drawn together before the picture becomes clear. Before the battle-plan can be mapped out!"

"Right," he said. "And there's your error!"

Sharply, she said, "What do you mean?"

"Your reasoning's correct, but your conclusion is cock-eyed. You're assuming the operation here is complete — that all the information is in our hands, that all the men of the sabotage team have been rounded up." He pointed his cigarette at her. "Suppose we've missed one thing, one cardinal fact? Suppose there are still one or two of Lessing's boys on the loose? What then, McCann?"

Her eyes became wide and round.

"It'll go on," he said. "These teams are trained that way. If all but one are caught, that one goes on and does the job. We know the plan here called for the complete destruction of the yard. That can happen yet, McCann. And if it does, the battle-plan you've talked about will be — a blueprint for disaster."

"Sam!" she whispered. "I'm sorry I said —"

"Forget it." He was scowling now, intent upon this line of thought. "Lessing's turned State's evidence. But not because he was afraid. He's covering for the men who are left in the yard, stalling for time." He paused, eyes narrow with thought. "I had that guy sold once; I swear I did. I was going to crowd him while he was unsure and worried about me. But it didn't work out. He stayed clear of the yard."

"Until word came through," Jill said.

Softly, he said, "I wonder?" Then, "When Lessing came down to the yard — the first time after the dinner — he was still chary of me. It was in the way he acted. He didn't turn ugly until — until we were in the time-office.

McCann, that's where I booted it. That's where he found out I was no Gestapo man."

Jill McCann said, "How, Sam?"

He considered that through a moment of silence. Then his lips stirred in a rueful grin. "You've got me," he said. "Nothing was done, nothing much was said — but somehow he knew. I've been hunting for the answer for quite a while now. All I've come up with is a headache."

"What are you going to do, Sam?"

"Ol' Superman Gallagher'll think of an angle."

A troubled look came to her eyes. "I feel pretty small about that crack, Sam. Honestly." She touched his arm. "You can't go back to the yard. Whoever's left there knows you now. You wouldn't have a chance."

"Thane brought that up," he said.

"Then what —" she began.

With a gentle hand he tipped her face to the light. The smile he had for her was wide. "Don't worry about it," he said easily. "And forget that pint-size tantrum you threw a while ago. You've been all right, McCann. On the shrewish side at times, but all-in-all quite the nicest wife I ever had."

Soberly, she said, "Thanks, Sam."

He leaned forward smiling, the shine of deviltry in his eyes. She could feel his breath, warm upon her cheek. "A lovely, Irish girl she is," he said, "and a grand wife for any man, save that she has a temper like a crocodile." He chuckled. "And teeth like one—" He bit her then, nipping her ear sharply. She struck at him and he stepped away, laughter on his lips.

"You did that to me," he said. "Remember?"

Jill McCann said, "Yes. And next time I'll use a cavalry saber on you — you wolf!"

"Okay." He laughed again. "But be sure you don't get tangled in my beard when you see me again — my long, gray beard." He lifted one hand in half-salute. "Good-bye, McCann. Take care of yourself."

"Sam! Where are you going?"

"Away," he said. "Over the hills and away."

"To see the Pretty Lady!"

"Ah!" he said. "You guessed it."

"Take a bite out of her," she told him acidly. "Take a good, big bite — and ruin all your teeth!"

A taxi dropped Sam Gallagher in front of the main gate. It was dark now; inside the shipyard, work lights burned everywhere. Sam dug his badge out of his pocket and the gate guard let him through.

Seaboard's time-office lay to the south. Sam went that way. He passed the carrier hull, huge beyond belief now that the scaffolding had been stripped away from her flanks. Red, white, and blue bunting was draped across her bow. A crew of men worked around a platform there.

"Tomorrow," one said, "she hits the drink."

Another laughed. "Some splash she'll make!"

And Sam walked on. The launching date had been moved up again; another record broken. But that was old stuff to the workmen here. "Give us steel an' get out o' th' way — we'll give you ships!" And they did it too! The bookkeepers and clerks and farm-hands of yesterday were welders now, sweating beneath their hoods. They were the lay-down men, the shipwrights, the riggers, building cargo hulls and fighting ships.

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And doing a job! Sam thought.

The Seaboard office was just ahead. Lea Damaron's car was parked beside the building. And that was strange, for Lea worked the lead-off shift; she should have gone home a full half-day ago. "So McCann was right!" Sam Gallagher found a dry amusement in the thought. "I will see the Pretty Lady after all —"

He pushed open the door and went into the office. Lea Damaron looked up from her desk and smiled. Another woman — the gray-haired, motherly soul who ran the office for the second shift — peered at him over the top of her glasses. Sam had a moment of wonder then. What excuse could he give for being here?

"I've been expecting you," Lea said.

Sam almost fumbled that. "You have?"

"Why not? — it's pay-day." She opened a card-index box that stood upon her desk. "Any pilebuck will miss a shift now and then — they get sick, or taken drunk, or forget to set the alarm clock. But they're all here on pay-day, Sam. You're no exception to the rule." She took a slip of green paper from the box and handed it across the counter. "Your check, Mr. Gallagher."

"Thanks, Lea."

"Don't thank me," she said. "You earned it."

She turned again to an open ledger, cool and very business-like. "Estimate day," she said in explanation. "I have to get this report in tonight or Seaboard doesn't get paid." She paused. "I suppose you know the job is shut down for a couple of days, Sam."

"Why?" He said that carefully.

"Material shortage of some sort."

He folded his check into a square, allowing himself

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a brief, mental grin. Material shortage! Lea was more right than she knew. Seaboard was fresh out of executive material, short a General Manager, an Expediting Engineer. Soon — tomorrow, or the day after — other men would quietly take over and the work would go on. But now —

Sam turned his mind from that line of thought. In the time-office here, one day ago, Max Lessing had stood at the counter's end. Lessing, the King Louse, with an ugly look in his narrowed eyes and a questioning slant to his head. Somehow, in the space of moments, the work of months had been smashed. Somehow Lessing had known — not guessed! — exactly why Sam was in the yard.

But how? Nothing had been said. There'd been a little talk of Germany, some mention of Sam's book, and a word or two about the Gestapo. Nothing in that to trip a man; nothing that had not been said at the dinner, two nights before. A code phrase, perhaps? No. That didn't fit. Max Lessing would have sprung that at the dinner.

So it wasn't the talk, Sam thought.

Forget the things Max Lessing had said, and what was left. The office. Four walls, a counter, the desks, the filing cases— Wait, now! The human element came into this — the people who'd been inside the office then. If you struck out the talk, it came to that. Someone inside the office had been the peg upon which this thing had turned.

Check! Sam told himself.

And in his mind he placed them all the way they'd been the day before: Max Lessing at the counter's end, Lea Dameron at her desk, Kelly near the door, wetting

his stub of pencil with his tongue. Nordstrom, the man who pushed the second shift, had stood halfway down the counter. Like that, at first. Then Brownie had come in with a requisition for two ax-handles.

Careful now! Sam thought.

The trick was to think this through, slowly and clearly. The answer — well, he knew that now. Instinct had gone ahead of reasoning to come up with a name. It was the proof he lacked. A good mind would find it here. Thane's would! Emotion did not run wild in him. With the clean, sharp blade of logic he'd cut away the unessential to reach the heart and core. He'd —

Ah! Sam thought. That's it!

You could cancel names and people out of this, the way parts are canceled out of an equation. Lea, for example. She'd jumped him for being a draft-dodger or a spy. So it had not been she. Kelly? No! There'd been a good simplicity in him, a deep-grained honesty. Whatever else he might have done, he could not have sold his country short.

Nordstrom? Sam pictured the man's face — thin, sharp-boned, and with a bitter cast. He was a foreman; he'd been in daily contact with Max Lessing. Sure. But he'd had business in the office. He'd used the phone to order material, and he'd left before the hate and ugliness had flamed up in Lessing's eyes.

Then cancel Nordstrom out. Draw a line through Lea's name. Through Kelly's. And who was left. *Brownie!* The name was an ice-clear ringing in Sam Gallagher's mind. Sweat started on his back.

Brownie! he thought. Check!

And there was proof. Not jury proof, perhaps. Not

iron-bound evidence that would damn a man in court — but proof enough! The matter of the ax-handles, for example. Brownie's working day had been over when he'd come with the requisition. He'd been on his way home, and yet — he'd stopped to get ax-handles he did not need and could not use. So the requisition had been a prop, a bit of business to put Brownie in the office at just that moment. To put him there when Max Lessing was talking of Germany, of the working methods of the Gestapo.

Why? That was simple too, when you looked back. Brownie was one of the men whose job was to destroy the yard. Check! If the Gestapo had sent a man to watch Max Lessing, that man would have known the names of all Max Lessing's men. He would have shown that, in the office here, by some small word or sign. Wait — now! There was more to this. He'd ignored O'Day, at Lessing's place, and nothing had gone wrong. Why, then, should hell break loose because he'd given Brownie no nod of recognition? Because O'Day was a stooge and unimportant. But Brownie was no stooge — not Brownie! — he was a bigger gun. He was bigger than Max Lessing, in every way. So Lessing had been outranked in the office; Brownie had been in command. Sam had given his attention to the wrong man! That way they'd known who Sam was and exactly where he stood!

Check, Sam thought. Check again.

Lea said, "Why so quiet, Sam?"

"I didn't want to bother you," he said.

She laughed. "I'm almost through."

He went around the counter to her side; he sat on the desk-edge there. The card-index box was still open. The time cards for the lead-off shift were in that box. On pay-

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day, a man's check was clipped to his card. Now only a few checks stood in the file. Sam Gallagher ran his fingertips over them.

"It looks like you were wrong, Lea," he said. "There're four of these left — four pilebucks didn't show today. How come?"

"I'll guess with you," Lea said.

He tipped his head to read the names. "Walter J. Bevins. Gordon Marx —"

"That's Ikey," Lea said.

"Kelly —"

Lea said, "Funny. He never missed a shift before."

Sam Gallagher swallowed. "And Tom Brownell."

"Brownell? I don't remember him."

Sam thought: You wouldn't! That's his greatest gift —

Aloud, he said, "He's a big guy, Lea. Built like a tank. He's never in a hurry, but he gets a lot done." Sam flicked Brownie's card from the file. "I'd like to get in touch with him. He owes me a little money."

"His phone number's on the card."

"Yes," said Sam. "So it is."

Lea closed the ledger. She gathered the papers on her desk, stuffed them in an envelope. Across the room, the gray-haired woman was taking her coat from a hanger.

"There!" said Lea. "All done."

"Where to now?" Sam asked.

"The hospital. Then home."

The gray-haired woman murmured a good-bye and went out into the night. Sam waited while Lea locked her desk and turned out the lights. They were on the steps outside the office when Sam said, "I think I will call Brownie, after all. D'you mind, Lea?"

"No," she said. "I'll wait in the car."

He heard her steps round the building as he dialed. Headlights came on then; the glare splashed through the windows to light the room. Sam waited, the blur of a distant ringing in his ear. The line opened.

"Gallagher," Sam said.

James Thane's voice was cool. "Yes, Sam?"

"I've got a name for you. An address."

James Thane said, "Good."

"Tom Brownell, 125 East Fifth—" Sam's hand was cupped around the mouthpiece; his voice was soft-pitched and low. Out in the night, an automobile starter made a dim, whirring sound.

Thane said, "Where will you be, Sam?"

"Here," said Sam quietly. "Right here."

Lea pulled up in front of the office as he came out. He locked the door carefully, handed her the keys.

"Hop in," she said. "I'll give you a lift."

"No," he told her. "But thanks anyway."

She rubbed the steering wheel with the heel of one gloved hand. The faint light of the dash panel slanted up across her lips, her cheeks. She did not look at him.

"Jeff told me about the wire," she said.

"Yes, Lea?"

"I guess I owe you an apology."

"You're wrong about that." He was leaning on the car door; he reached past her to switch the motor off. "I've been doing a little thinking, Lea. There're a couple of things that need saying along about now."

Her head was bent. "Yes, Sam."

"Let's take love," he said, and saw the corners of her mouth tighten just a little. "Now there's a word that's

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really been kicked around. Can you tell me what it means, Lea?"

"Boy-meets-girl," she said. "What else?"

"That's strictly Hollywood and Tin-Pan Alley."

"All right," she said. "Then you tell me."

"I wouldn't know for sure, but I can make a guess." He touched her bare wrist with his fingertips, then took his hand away. "I'd say there are two kinds, Lea. One is quick and hot — like an incendiary bomb."

"And burns out soon," Lea said.

"The other's the quiet kind, the steady kind. Made up of small things: a house planned together and finally built; the dream of kids and a long future; the sort of understanding that doesn't have to be put in words —"

"What are you trying to say?"

"That I know. And have for days."

Softly, she said, "Sam, I —"

He cupped his palm beneath her chin. He kissed her and her lips were cool — cool and very still. There was no resistance in her now, no help for him. He moved back, away from the car.

"You see?" he said. "It's gone."

"I'm sorry, Sam."

"Remember the day you took me home," he said. "I was more right then than I knew. 'One off the arm for a couple of kids who're gone, along with the high school dances, the skating rink, and the sparrow who got drunk on the smell of roses—'" He smiled. "We made a grab at the past, Lea, and it didn't work. You've known for a long time that it couldn't work, no matter what happened. You have been too loyal to let go."

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Her eyes were shining now. "Sam —"

"Tell Jeff hello for me," he said.

"Yes," she whispered. "Good night — nice guy!"

Through the first long hours Sam waited beside the tool-house. He sat on a carbide can there, his back to the wall. He watched a wan scrap of moon, a coppery moon, come up over the dark hills. He thought back across the days he'd spent here in the yard, the days he'd worked with Tom Brownell.

Brownie had been the key-piece from the start; Sam could see that now. But as Thane had once said, "First find your horse — then it's easy to prove the beast has hooves and a tail!" There'd been something in that crack, because Brownie was a stand-out now. Take the dinner invitation of Lessing's. Lessing had had no contact with Sam. Thus his suspicion had been, really, the suspicion of another man. "I think Sam Gallagher's a plant. We'd better check on him!" Like that. Sam had been teamed with Brownie through the working hours of each day. Who had been in a better spot to pass the word along?

There were other things; the quiet competence and thoroughness of the man, his grasp of technical detail. And where would the leader of a sabotage team be but out in the yard, in the thick of things. Not in the office, as Lessing had been, but out where he could watch the plan for the destruction of the yard take form and grow.

"Check," said Sam. "That fits."

Brownie. And in the time-office, locked in Lea's cigar-box safe, were four pay-checks. Ikey's, Bevins', Kelly's and Brownie's. A pay-check means a lot to a working man. It means a new hat for the old lady, shoes for the

kids, and maybe a pint for the guy who earned it. It means more than working; it's the reason for working. A man might miss a few days' work. He might forget to go to church on Sunday. He might get drunk and miss his wedding, or his wife's mother's funeral. But he won't miss a pay-check.

And Brownie would know that.

In Brownie's business you had to live from day to day. Today the F.B.I. and Thane didn't know about him; tomorrow they might. You had to build for tomorrow, whether you were sure there'd be one or not. Brownie would leave the yard and the city — he had to leave — but before going he would get his check. To leave that check would be to leave a glaring reminder that something was wrong with Brownie.

A pointed finger was all that Thane or the F.B.I. would need. The yard had taken Brownie's picture and fingerprints when he'd gone to work. Each yard did the same, each munitions plant, each factory. To leave that check would mean he could never work in any plant again, it would mean the end of his usefulness — a saboteur with nothing to destroy, or way to destroy it. It would mean the end of Brownie —

Anyway, Sam thought, I hope I'm right —

He got up to stamp the cold from his feet. The wind had strengthened, turning raw again. He sought the shelter of the tool-house. An hour passed. Two-thirty, then. The steady roar of the yard was a friendly sound, solid and lasting, a promise endlessly repeated— "You do your job and I'll do mine—" At a quarter to three Sam saw two shadows against the entrance-gate light.

One clean-shouldered and big, the other small and

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quick beside it, moving with springs in its feet. Ikey and Bevins. They came to the time-office door. They looked in the dark time-office window.

"What the hell?" Ikey said. "Nobody home."

Bevins swore. "What time is it?"

Ikey bent so light reflected from his watch.

"Damned near April —"

"For once you're telling the truth. That ain't a watch you got there. It's a calendar." He made a pass at Ikey with his fist. "Maybe it's one o'clock, maybe it's two. Christ! We gotta wait hours —!"

Sam Gallagher moved out from the shadows of the tool-house. "It's a quarter to three," he said.

"Hiya, Sam," Bevins said.

Ikey consulted his watch again.

Triumphantly, he said, "Right on the nose!"

"Small fry," Bevins said, "that's yesterday's time."

"I know," Ikey said. "All you gotta do is add twenty-four hours —"

To Sam, Bevins said, "What's the pitch? Seaboard gone outa business?"

"For a day or two. Material shortage."

"No checks, eh?"

"Later, I guess. Anyway, I'm waiting. Where were you mugs yesterday?"

"Where was we?" Ikey put his chest out. "Shall I tell 'im, Bevins? Sure I'll tell 'im. Gallagher, my friend, me an' Bevins joined the Army."

Bevins hit Ikey a jolt on the shoulder.

"That we is phony," he told Sam. "Or maybe Ikey's pregnant again. We didn't join the Army. Ikey did. I joined the Air Corps —"

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Ikey said, "They wouldn't let 'im in the Army."

Sam said, "That's wonderful."

Bevins in the Air Corps. In his mind Sam snapped his fingers — wouldn't you know it? Clean — that was the word for Bevins and a body like his. Sharp. You could look at him and see the guy was made for it. You could look at Bevins and thank God for him.

"What branch did you get, Ikey?"

"The infantry," Ikey said.

And there was no pathos in that. He belonged in the infantry. No fly-boy, Ikey, no glamour pants. Give him the work; work he knew. "When she's too tough for anybody else," he liked to say, "she's just right for Ikey —" And oddly enough, he meant it; more often than not, that's just the way it was —

Bevins said, "Do we wait for them checks?"

"Let's come back," Ikey said. "Let's go get a drunk on. I gotta have a last one. We'll go get drunk and hunt up Kelly —"

"Yeah," Bevins said. "That Irish bastard owes me a pint." He grinned at Sam. "You gotta go along," he said. "She's the last toot in th' whistle. We'll get you drunker'n seven hundred dollars."

"Thanks a lot," Sam answered. "But I can't. I'd like to but I can't —"

He watched Ikey and Bevins go. So long, kids, and give 'em hell! Why — dammit — why did his throat always jam up at a time like this? He'd like to get drunk with those two, he thought. He would like it very much. Real people — honest-to-God people. Pilebucks. Sam was a pilebuck, and suddenly he was completely proud of that.

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In the darkness, Ikey said, "Duck, Kelly. You're in the bight of the line —"

They wouldn't find Kelly. Kelly was gone.

"And, Ikey, lad," Sam whispered, "Kelly won't be back —"

Farther in the darkness, Ikey stumbled and went full length. He got up and kicked something that rang with a tin-like, hollow sound.

"Them carbide cans," he swore. "Them Goddam depth bombs!"

Depth bombs!

"That's it!" Sam said. "That's it!"

And there it was — a going-away present beyond all presents, bigger than any drunk Ikey could buy. Depth bombs! A carbide can was about the size and shape of a depth bomb. Moreover, it was the connecting link Sam had needed. Ikey had put carbide cans and depth bombs together in a phrase. Once together, their meanings had crystallized, brought into focus scattered thoughts and apparently unrelated facts — had given Sam a single answer to a single question.

He went down under the shipways, running.

Under the Whirley trestle of the Number Four Way, he went down on his knees in the soft sand. A lighted match found him the hole he wanted — a space between the piling of the way. He crawled under the way on his belly, crawled far in. He went on until he bumped a carbide can. He shook it and it was empty. He went on to the next, shook that. It wasn't empty. He struck another match. He rolled the can and wires came up out of the sand, thin wires that led to the tightly fitted top of the can. Sam Gallagher tore them free.

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There were more cans, blue and shining in the pale light of his match. More wires. Sam broke all the wires he could find. He crawled from that way to the next. There were more cans there; more wires for Sam to break.

He swore as he worked, cursing himself for not having seen this plan before. But the carbide cans were everywhere in the yard. The carbide was used in the manufacture of acetylene gas; the cans were waste. Once emptied, they served as garbage cans, as storage bins; they filled a hundred needs. Brownie and the others had known that, and they'd known a man will not notice one article among a thousand — a loaf of bread in a bake-shop, a bottle of milk in a dairy —

These cans, fat with explosive, had come into the yard on a Seaboard truck. Old stuff to the guards who'd waved them by. But Seaboard's contracts here were for shipways and docks and those were built of piling, plank, and timber. Little steel went into them. Seaboard had no acetylene plant here, no need of one. Thus the carbide cans had been piled unnoticed against the tool-house wall and left there until the sabotage team could move them down the shipway under the cover of darkness.

"Damn them!" Sam panted.

He scrambled out under a Whirley trestle now. He climbed a slanting brace to reach the deck. He ran inshore, heading toward the Seaboard office. Lights shone in the windows there. *Lea's back!* Sam thought, and saw the door swing wide to let a man come out. There was no mistaking that stocky body, no other shoulders would fill a door as well.

"Brownie!" Sam whispered. "He did come back!"

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Brownie struck off into the dark. Sam waited and Brownie appeared again, crossing under the swinging boom of the Number Three Whirley, again in a patch of light beyond the assembly platform and, again, passing the open tool-shop window.

The outfitting dock! Sam thought.

Damn it, yes! The outfitting dock, the aircraft carriers. There'd be carbide cans under the dock, more close under the gray sides of the carriers. Explosives! Canned violence to rip their bellies wide. To put them on the bottom, inert and lifeless, before they'd ever known the rushing life of a plane's motor or the touch of landing gear.

And suddenly Sam knew Brownie's plan as clearly as if he'd laid it himself. Blow the outfitting dock and the carrier hulls first. The farthest point in the yard upstream. Sheet the night with flame. Fill the air with a torrent of sound, with fragments of men and metal, and that chaos would be a cloak of protection.

In it a man — a dozen men — could move unmolested, unnoticed. Without haste, with that methodical way Brownie liked, he could work down the yard. Number Eleven Way. Number Ten. Number Nine. Heaping each on the blaze of disaster, adding another as the tumult grew. A symphony of destruction, played with thundering chords — a fantastic theme. Steel swelling, bursting skyward, scaffolds toppling, Whirleys coming down on bent legs, men running, men hurt, men dying. A devil's holiday —

Guards — Sam thought.

There were no guards near. He could find one in a few minutes. He could explain the thing to him in another

few minutes. There'd be the captain to notify, reinforcements to gather. All this in ten minutes. And they'd reach the dock just in time to ride out on the first blaze of hell.

"— damn the guards!"

Sam went under Number Three Whirley at a dead run. Crossing before the assembly platform, his caulks rang on steel plates, slipped. He went down on his back. A rigger yelled, "For Christ's sake —!" Some fool was always running somewhere about something. Sam went past the tool-room, turned beyond Number Eleven Way. The outfitting dock lay ahead.

More than a thousand feet of it — up and down-stream. Shops, warehouses on the shore-side, and before them two Whirleys building ships. Building aircraft carriers. The flight-decks of two were nearly done, the off-set stacks, the bridges, just growing. A third was a skeleton of yellow steel beams, of cables and scaffolds, shot with the blue points of a hundred welding arcs. Workmen moved under the clustered lights. Several hundred men.

"Get off there!" Sam yelled.

It was a gesture of helplessness and frustration.

He found a stairway, went down it. There were cat-walks built under the dock, running the length of it, cross-walks connecting them. There were fire-walls — thick plank bulkheads, built the width of the dock, solidly from the water to the deck — the doors of them weighted, always shut. Piling marched in endless rows, the braces and intricate lacework, a geometric pattern repeating itself over and over.

Sam banged his way through two firedoors, found each bay empty. He stopped. How could you find a man

in a place like this? The light was not enough — a single globe at far intervals. Sounds were thick, booming down from the drum-head of the deck. You could hunt a man for hours, pass him a dozen times on these interlocking cat-walks. Hours! Minutes were all Sam had and damned few of them.

And suddenly he was swamped with the complete futility of it. Helpless. Sweating. Brownie was here, somewhere under the dock, protected by shadows, cloaked with sound. A cool Brownie. Big and sure and unhurried. A man content with the work he had to do. Stringing wire, bending wire to the terminals of a detonator, pulling the handle high. Brownie, destruction at his fingertips, face placid, satisfied, waiting for a moment that pleased him.

This moment, or the next, or the next —

"Damn it!" Sam whispered. "Damn it —"

Turning, he ran to the outside cat-walk. He was close to the ships, there, not ten feet away. Straddling the handrail, reaching out, he caught a fender-log anchor cable. He swung his weight to it. The cable burned his hands as he went down. The fender-logs were big. Cabled end-to-end the length of the dock, they held the ships away from the dock itself. They were a floating pathway down the narrow aisle between the ship's side and the fender pile. Sam could touch the piling or the ships with less than an outstretched arm. He went down the logs, running.

He had light enough — waste light, spilled down from the work above. The water surface was thick, oil-smeared. Refuse lay jammed between the ships and fender-logs, locked in the eddies where the bow and

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stern curved out. Driftwood, bottles, fruit-rinds, scraps of lumber, paper lunch-boxes, cans —

But no carbide cans.

He didn't find one in the length of the dock. He came back, walking. Halfway back, he saw a two-by-four spiked to the piling. A foot of it was above the water, the rest indefinitely below. Scrap lumber, by the look of it; scaffolding, perhaps, left by the pilebucks when the dock was built. He saw another, farther on, and another. He found four in the length of the ship. Flat on his belly, he traced what he could of one. The board slanted away from the dock, deeply into the water beneath the ships. No scaffolding this. There was wire on the under side, two strands. Sam tore them free, broke them. When he'd broken all the wires, he climbed back into the dock.

On the cat-walk again, where he could see along the fender-logs, he waited. He put his hips against one hand-rail, leaned his weight straight-armed on the other. He'd been going a long time — he knew that now. His legs were dead under him, his lungs burned, and there was an uncontrollable shaking in his hands.

Brownie, he thought, let me get my breath.

And Brownie came just then.

Sam saw him swing out on an anchor cable and drop easily to the fender-log, into shadows. He appeared again through a spot of light, coming down-stream. Shadows slipped across him. He leaned out at intervals to check the wire on the two-by-fours, and came on, arms aswing — big arms that turned him easily around the anchor cables — big hands. Sam moved toward him along the cat-walk, holding to the shadows.

Above him, Sam turned and walked with Brownie,

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watching him. Watching the rolling, fluid stride, the turning of his thick body, the way light struck his face. Nothing disturbed that man. Nothing, ever. And suddenly Sam hated him. Hated him furiously and deeply, as he'd never hated another. For the placidness of the man, the utter efficiency, the patience —

Patience — God, what a store of it!

When you thought of what the man had done. The cans under the ships — weeks for them alone. Weeks of mostly waiting — for the right moment, for darkness, fog, a heavy storm. For an hour's work, perhaps — two cans in place. More waiting, then. And time to think of being caught. To understand the odds against him. To watch the odds grow with each day, with each can placed, like a living cliff, always nearer, always higher, inevitably to be faced some day ahead.

"Brownie!" Sam called.

He said it loud enough for Brownie to hear above the roaring work. Brownie's face came up, lifting. Light caught it, showed smooth cheeks, impassive, cold. Brownie lifted a hand, shading his eyes. He looked for Sam and found him as Sam leaned out. He looked past Sam, both ways on the cat-walk, above to the deck, down the fender-logs. There was no panic in the man, or hint of fear — it was a precise gathering of facts, a cool balancing of the odds against him.

Sam was alone.

Brownie said, "I'm coming up."

"I'll wait," Sam answered.

Brownie stepped to a sash, to a sway brace. There was no jerk of haste in his movements, though he came up swiftly. He went under the cat-walk to the *W* of braces,

turned and came up the brace slanting back. He dropped to the cat-walk, his caulks snapping into the wood. He was ten feet from Sam. Light fell across him dimly, showed thick shoulders, legs bent a little. His hand moved toward Sam along the rail. Sam felt his belly drawing tight.

"You and your God-damned cans!" he said.

"You broke the wires?"

"Yes."

Sam's back was against a piling, hard against it, tall there. His belly was lean, corded; his chest big with strength and tight. This was the moment. He was ready for it and not afraid. Thank God, he was not afraid. There was easy sweat on his hide, plenty of it, but no shaking in his hands or legs. There was eagerness in him. A savagery tightened the long muscles of his back.

Brownie said, "You spoiled a lot of work."

"And I'm not done yet."

"No," Brownie agreed, "you're not done yet."

He came a slow step closer.

"You took too big a bite," Sam told him. "One ship or one way you could have managed. But not the whole yard. Someone was bound to stumble on it."

Brownie slanted his big head.

"We planned one way," he said. "It was easy. We took another. Two were ready —" He talked to Sam, to hold Sam there, while he closed the distance between them. "We could blow the two any time. So we went on to others. If we were caught we could blow those ready. You got the rest, but I'm still here. And now the yard is ready."

"I caught you," Sam said.

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II

narrow cat-walk rail. The rail cracked. He swung Brownie again; the rail cracked again. A third time, and the rail broke. Deliberately, Sam pitched himself and Brownie off the cat-walk, down through fifteen feet of space, into the black depths of the river.

There was shocking cold, and nothing before his eyes but impenetrable blackness. Brownie's struggles turned furious. Sam held to him, squeezed to him. He wrapped his legs around Brownie's legs and stopped their kicking. They went down. The weight of their clothes dragged them down. And Sam Gallagher was glad to go.

In his mind, fleetingly, there was a picture of Jeff. Jeff naked on a raft of logs, slim and small and just fourteen. Jeff proud and bragging. "Ain't nobody c'n hold his breath like Sam. He's fish. He c'n bring up bottom in forty feet. I'll betcha on it —"

And Jeff had always won. He'd won again two weeks ago. A different kind of bet, a bigger stake. And now Sam had a bet on himself. He couldn't shoulder two hundred pounds; but he could swim, he could hold his breath. He could save a man, or drown him. He was going to drown Brownie.

Brownie's hands pawed at Sam's arms, tore at them. Sam buried his arms tighter into Brownie's belly. Brownie's fingers worked around to Sam's hands. Sam gripped them hard. Desperately, Brownie pried at Sam's fingers. He got one up, got a grip on it, shoved it back. Sam let go of Brownie, jerking his hand free. It was that, or a finger broken. Brownie kicked free of Sam's feet, kicked Sam away. Sam rolled upside down in the water. Twisting, he reached for Brownie, blindly in the dark. But Brownie was gone. Sam beat his way to the top.

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He broke the surface, gathering air into his straining lungs; broke into darkness shot with faint light. He couldn't see Brownie. A sash brace was just above him. He caught it, hauled himself up. Something white moved on the next bent. Brownie's hand, holding the sash. Sam swung around the piling to the line girt. The girt ran between the bents — four inches wide, twelve inches high. Sam stepped out on it.

Brownie saw him. His face turned through the dim light, expressionless, set. He coughed a little. No panic there, no fear. Methodically, he hauled his chest up, over the sash brace. Sam jumped for the man, feet first. His caulks cut the side of Brownie's head, his neck. Brownie slid down, still clinging to the brace. Sam got two hands under Brownie's chin, a foot on the sash, and pried Brownie free.

They went into the water. Brownie arched, reaching back for Sam as they went under. Sam ducked, slid down Brownie's body till his hands came about Brownie's hips. He tangled Brownie's legs again, and they went down steadily in spite of the thrash of Brownie's arms, down into the liquid black.

Sam Gallagher clung to Brownie's legs. Brownie tried to break Sam's grip but lacked the strength for it. His movements became aimless and limp. They drifted a moment longer. Sam needed air desperately then; his throat jumped with the want of it. He pushed away from Brownie, swimming up. He caught a brace and pulled himself up and out. He crouched there, gulping air and waiting.

Brownie's hands came into the light first, widespread, and then his soaked, round head showed between them.

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His face was still set, still without expression. There was hate in his eyes, black and ugly, but no pleading and no thought of mercy.

And in Sam Gallagher there was none. Brownie's mouth was open, his thick neck distended. He was gasping for air when Sam Gallagher drove at him again — drove at him feet-first, with all his strength and all his weight behind his slashing caulks. He caught Brownie's shoulder, his cheek. Brownie went down, his mouth still open. Sam rode him down, driving him farther with upward sweeps of his hands. Far under, Sam bent his legs, springing. The thrust sent Brownie deeper; sent Sam up. Sam climbed out on a sash again.

He waited for Brownie and Brownie came. His slow-moving arms cut the water. His head broke the surface. His face was dully red with blood. His eyes sought Sam, hate-filled and unafraid. Sam jumped at him again.

It was murder — the death of a man who'd killed without pity — but murder still. The cold and ruthless stamping out of a life. And Sam Gallagher was sick with it, weak with it. He wanted to stop and knew he could not. He lost count of the times he took Brownie under. Their struggle was a nightmare now, unreal and endless.

Brownie no longer fought back. He did not resist when Sam came down on him; he was limp when Sam dragged him under. But always he came back. Always his head broke the surface to show a countenance bloody but stubbornly alive. The hate was undiminished in his eyes.

He came up, the last time, close to the piling between

the sash on one side and the sash on the other. Sam watched him take hold of the far sash and hang there. Then, with slow strength, Brownie pulled himself up part way. He was between the sashes, in the eighteen-inch space there, facing away from Sam.

Sam Gallagher stepped to the sash behind the man. He caught Brownie's head, heaved up until Brownie's hips were just below the sash level. Then Sam threw himself back hard, dragging at Brownie's head. Brownie's knees caught under the far sash; his back arched across the near one. For a moment they were locked together there. Brownie clawed at Sam's hands with sudden, desperate strength. And then — the brittle, dry-breaking sound was in Sam's ears. He could feel it in his arms and shoulders. Brownie was limp, his back broken. His eyes did not close, but a glaze wiped away the hating. He was done with life and done with killing. Sam let him go. Brownie slid off the sash and into the water. Death pulled him down.

It took Sam Gallagher a long time to reach the catwalk. Once there, he sprawled full-length, his face pressed to the wood. The smell of dirt and oil was in his nostrils. Above him, the drum of work went steadily on. A tug passed far out on the river; waves rolled across the breast of it to swirl around the piling.

The eastern sky was pale when Sam left the dock. The tall light clusters looked wan against the coming day. A welder, hood up, looked at Sam. "Hey, buddy," he called, "how's the water?" And Sam answered, "Just fine, kid. Couldn't be better . . ." A truck rolled by with a load of steel; a Whirley moved, bell ringing; a chipping gun let go with a busy sound.

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II

Work as usual, Sam thought, and set his jaws against a feeling of sick emptiness.

The main gate was closed; a guard stood with his back against the wire mesh of it. There were clusters of men waiting, inside and out. What the hell? Sam thought tiredly. He was moving that way when a man left the crowd to meet him. It was Stone, and Stone's homely face was deeply serious.

"He wasn't in that apartment," Stone said. "We thought he might come here. He —"

"He is here —" Sam wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "And he'll stay here, Stone. He's dead. I killed him —"

Stone waited. A good man, Stone, not too nosy.

"There's a mess of carbide cans under the ways," Sam said. "Full of explosive. There're some under the outfitting dock, and the carriers. Better get 'em out."

"We shall," said Stone. "And you?"

Sam rubbed his face again and tried to think. "I'd better hunt some dry clothes, I guess. Can I get out?"

Stone smiled. "Now you can."

The guard unlocked the gate. Men came in, going to work; men went out, a day's work behind them. Sam fell in step with those headed for the street. Raw wind met him there. He reached the curb and paused, remembering he had no place to go. His bags were still in the house on West Cherry Drive — the empty house. He saw a crumpled bit of paper go rolling before the wind and the wry, small grin pulled at his mouth.

Like that, he thought, the tumbleweed —

"Sam!" a voice called. "Sam Gallagher!"

The car was there in front of him, though he had not

seen it come. Thane's car. Jill McCann was at the steering wheel, a grave, small Jill whose lips held the shape of an uncertain smile.

"Get in," she said. "Please, Sam."

He got in beside her, spreading his hands to the heater's warmth. "You're soaked," she said then. "Get out of that shirt and jacket. I've got a blanket here." He turned his eyes to her. "Same old McCann," he said, but he obeyed. He was glad to drift with the current now; glad he did not have to think.

She put the blanket around his shoulders.

"Sam." She was whispering now. "How did —"

"It's all over," he said. "We can go."

Jill started the car. The wide thoroughfare was almost deserted. Only swing-shift men who'd worked overtime were homeward bound now. On their left, the lights of the yard were a blaze against the sky. The voice of it was loud above the motor sound — an unending roar made up of the thunder of chipping hammers and rivet guns, the slugging crash of sledges on steel, the deep bellowing of heavy engines —

"Betsy makes a lot of noise," Jill said.

"And a lot of ships." Sam Gallagher's eyes were closed, his body relaxed to the flooding warmth of the heater. "A ship in ten days — that's building, McCann."

"Can she keep on like that?" Jill asked.

Quietly, Sam said, "That depends."

"Upon what?"

"It's like this, McCann. Betsy is a good machine — sound design, plenty of power. From a distance she looks fine. But get close to her, get inside, and you'll find trouble. Betsy's got a bum clutch — the Labor Union

— and it's slipping a third of the time. There's a main bearing that has too heavy a grease. The cost-plus bearing. Some men, McCann, think Betsy is a machine for making money, not ships. And there are cogs, working men, who take hold only now and then."

"What's to be done about it?"

"Betsy's got a hundred and fifty million owners. They'll get mad, one day, and they'll appoint a mechanic to work on her. A two-fisted mechanic with plenty of hair on his chest. He'll take the slack out of that clutch — take it out or junk it. He'll give that bearing enough grease to run on, and no more. He'll explain to those cogs that it's work or fight, and he'll say it so it means something more than a nice phrase for the papers."

"I hope it's soon," Jill said.

"Two of us," Sam answered.

They rode in silence for a time.

"How did you find me?" he said then.

"Thane told me where you were."

"The kids," he said. "How're they?"

"Fine." Her voice was even, low. "They asked for you at dinner. I said you'd be around to say good-bye."

"I will," he said.

He watched the play of light and shadow across her face. A troubled thought came to his mind. He put it in words: "McCann, what will happen to Paul and Gretchen now? Where will they go?"

"To some institution, I suppose."

"Hey!" His voice turned rough. "Thane can't do that! Paul's a sweet kid, gentle and shy and easily hurt. He isn't the kind who can slug it out with a hundred other

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kids. He'd crawl away in a corner. He needs someone to help him with his reading —"

"And with his baseball," she said.

"That's right! And Gretchen's had too much hell already. She shouldn't be kicked around. She —" Sam drew a deep breath. "We can't let Thane do this!"

She looked at him. "Well?"

"Park this thing," he said.

She pulled over to the curb and stopped. He bent toward her. "You know the answer, McCann," he said, and his voice was husky. "We'll take care of them. Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher. Not make-believe. The real thing."

"I thought —"

She let the rest go, searching his face with a long, grave look. "You mean it," she said at last. "So it's all right, Sam. Truly. But it took you long enough."

"And a fine sharp tongue she's got —"

He leaned close to her.

"Get away from me, Gallagher!" she said, and there was laughter in her voice. Then, "That was only habit speaking, Sam. Pay no attention —"

The End

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